

**FEMININE TWANG:
RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF COUNTRY MUSIC'S
LEGENDARY SECOND WAVE WOMEN**

by

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This dissertation explores the overlooked contributions of women in country music to the study of rhetoric. While women have participated as writers and performers since country music's infancy, this contribution is rarely recognized as politically or rhetorically significant. Because country music is often a conservative space that upholds and preserves traditionalist white masculinity, women in country music have had to cultivate and hone rhetorical strategies in order to sustain careers. More specifically, legendary women in country music from the 1960s had to negotiate institutional oppressions, in the form of censorship and sexist male gatekeepers, in light of the changing political landscapes linked, in part, to second wave feminism, which threatened the status quo. In four case studies, I examine the possibilities and pitfalls of these women's rhetorical strategies, some recognized and some I have named, which reveal larger cultural implications that are largely relevant today. The first case study explores singer Patsy Cline's pop career and its inconsistencies with her now mythic posthumous public memory as a country star. Cline's visual legacy is used in a variety of ways, most notably as an ageless rhetorical "eye-con," embedded in the reemergence of white Americana. The second case study explores how Bobbie Gentry's strategic silences, in the forms of an elusive persona and Southern Gothic storytelling, challenge and contribute to feminist discourse on "voice." While Gentry's sexualization often overshadowed her talents, her enduring legacy reveals striking rhetorical impact. Rarely seen as rhetorically "too much," Dolly Parton successfully negotiates binds

through her use of camp performance. By employing markers of respectability to temper her gender expression, Parton appeals to disparate audiences and highlights the importance of camp as a resource for marginalized groups. Loretta Lynn mobilized a career that attended to political shifts and reflected her own growth as a woman and performer. As an exemplar of the comic frame and feminine style, her empowering lyrics and public discourse generated loyal identifications among disenfranchised, rural women. In conclusion, this dissertation briefly looks at today's country music and its changing landscape, which reveals cultural anxieties as well as robust political potential.

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PREFACE

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1.0 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 SPOTLIGHTS ON THE MARGINS OF RHETORIC

In response to her 1968 hit “Stand by Your Man,” famed country music singer Tammy Wynette said: “I spent fifteen minutes writing it, and a lifetime defending it.” This iconic #1 country song not only transcended audiences across music genres, but garnered harsh criticism that has transcended generations.¹ More specifically, second wave feminists slammed the song’s premise to “stand by” and uncritically forgive your man, which reinscribed women’s roles as “doormats” who accept men’s presumably inevitable behavior.² Most notably, Wynette who has been dubbed the “First Lady of Country,” was famously criticized by another (future) First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton. During a nationally televised 1992 interview on *60 Minutes*, Clinton responded to allegations of her husband’s sexual infidelity, while he was Governor of Arkansas, by stating that, “You know, I’m not sitting here, some little woman, standing by my man like Tammy Wynette. I’m sitting here because I love him and respect him.”³ An uproar ensued and, twenty-four years after Wynette’s song was released, it still incited impassioned tension between women.

¹ This song reached #1 on Country Charts and #19 on Pop Charts and is revered as Wynette’s signature song, even though she performed other hits that addressed rather bold topics such as the stigma of divorce and single motherhood. See “D-I-V-O-R-C-E” (1968), “I Don’t Wanna Play House” (1968), and “Kids Say the Darndest Things” (1973).

² Beverly Keel, “Between Riot Grrrl and Quiet Girl: The New Women’s Movement in Country Music,” *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music*, eds. Kristine McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 157.

³ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Interview with Steve Kroft,” *60 Minutes* (CBS News, January 1992). Accessed August 2015 <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/hillarys-first-joint-interview-next-to-bill-in-92/>

Although Bill Clinton won the Presidential election, Hillary was still unpopular due, in part, to her “Wynette comment.” Even as she became an unprecedented contributor to the Clinton administration, the many rationales for “Hillary-hating” became a phenomenon that united polarized groups and uniquely violated norms of public decorum regarding treatment of the First Lady.⁴ One of the rationales behind Hillary-hating that is pertinent to this project is Clinton’s denigration of Wynette as a “little woman” and the subsequent alienation of women who relate to Wynette. This perceived denigration of personal choices intensified when Clinton defended her professional choices, which were seen as a potential conflict of interest, given her husband’s political positions, and incongruous with the historical role of “First Lady.” In response to a reporter’s question, Hillary stated that “I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life.”⁵ Her comment further alienated legions of “ordinary women” who may not identify as subversive and certainly not as feminists, which created a reductionist narrative of feminists vs. ordinary women.⁶

Additionally, as the First Lady of Arkansas, Hillary Rodham was often seen as an “outsider” as an Ivy-League-educated Northerner who criticized and belittled homemakers – who may strongly identify with “traditionalist” female country music singers of the South. Her

⁴ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “The Discursive Performance of Femininity: Hating Hillary” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 1 (1998): 1-19.

⁵ Gwen Ifill, “THE 1992 CAMPAIGN; Hillary Clinton Defends Her Conduct in Law Firm” *New York Times*, March 17, 1992, accessed August 19, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/17/us/the-1992-campaign-hillary-clinton-defends-her-conduct-in-law-firm.html>

⁶ Bonnie J. Dow, “Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 144. Bonnie J. Dow, “Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Gender Anxiety in Television News Coverage of the 1970 Women’s Strike for Equality” *Communication Studies* 50 (1999): 152. Dow highlights how media outlets and artistic choices frame feminists and non-feminists as adversaries or in opposition. She uses the term “ordinary women” to identify those who are invoked by media outlets to defend traditional femininity as if that were under attack by feminists. This manipulated opposition is intensified when the spectator is assumed to be male and will thus respond favorably to the women who proudly defend their feminine performance and sometimes specious agency in the form of “false consciousness.”

perceived personality only compounded her “outsider” status. As Shawn Parry-Giles points out, many of Hillary’s public failings in the media were attributed to her personality and personal style. Parry-Giles argues that close-up camera shots of Hillary positioned the audiences so that “we too become the recipients of her anger.”⁷ These examples highlight how Hillary Clinton’s media coverage deepened the ideological rift between an in-group and out-group. Clinton was interpreted as an angry intellectual feminist in opposition to bright-eyed “ordinary women” who believed that perhaps home life was their choice, their calling, or their religiously sanctioned role.⁸

Most significantly, the 1992 Wynette incident went beyond a regional tension and became a national, newsworthy moment that unveiled residual narratives that existed during the second wave of feminism, when media pitted women against women. For example, Susan Douglas describes how debates about the Equal Rights Amendment were reduced in the media to a “catfight” between Gloria Steinem and Phyllis Schlafly.⁹ As Bonnie Dow articulates, “the easiest narrative for journalists to construct is one in which feminists are pitted against specific women and in which those specific women are eager to defend themselves.”¹⁰ In effect,

⁷ Shawn J. Parry-Giles, “Mediating Hillary Rodham Clinton: Television News Practices and Image-Making in the Postmodern Age,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17 (2000): 217. For a discussion on the vilification of Hillary Clinton through the stylistic choices enacted by *Time Magazine* to conjure up deep rooted myths about women, which could be articulated as “image-making,” see Greg Dickinson and Karrin Vasby Anderson, “Fallen: O.J. Simpson, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and the Re-centering of White Patriarchy,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1 (2004): 271-296.

⁸ And due to pressure of the conservative Arkansas climate and her husband’s potential future as president, Hillary Rodham changed her name to reflect her marital status becoming Hillary Rodham Clinton in 1982 while campaigning for her husband. This was a decision that appealed to voters. She was named Arkansas’s “Woman of the Year” in 1983 and “Mother of the Year” in 1984.

For a discussion on Christianity and motherhood as women’s “calling” see Emily Deering Crosby, “A Quiverfull of Mommy Blogs: Ideological Subversion and Reinforcement of Mothering Models Online” (Master’s Thesis, Indiana University, 2011), 45-51.

⁹ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994), 221.

¹⁰ Bonnie J. Dow, “Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 144.

horizontal hostility between women of the second wave was an antidote to the fear-inducing potential of “sisterhood.”¹¹ This way, patriarchy is left largely undisturbed. However, the most striking thing about the 1992 Clinton clash over the valuation of women’s roles is the use of *Tammy Wynette* as the cultural trope seemingly representing all “ordinary women” who willingly participate under patriarchal constraints and uncritically “stand by their men.”¹²

Clinton’s use of Wynette to identify a demographic of essentialized nonfeminists with patriarchal sensibilities reveals the cultural capital ascribed to country music’s conservative and gendered commitment to “stand by one’s man.”¹³ In other words, Clinton’s comment resonated with American audiences because Wynette was and is a significant rhetorical figure. Further, Clinton was and has since been framed as overly critical, too ambitious, and “shrill,” reducing steadfast feminists to unlovable, “angry women.”¹⁴ By making feminists and ordinary women appear as adversaries, “feminism becomes about *women* not *patriarchy*.”¹⁵ In effect, seemingly unsympathetic feminists like Hillary Clinton are perceived as attacking ordinary women who embrace traditionalist domestic roles.¹⁶ In effect, this ideological derision unveils a seemingly

¹¹ Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994), 224.

¹² For an understanding of how women’s arguments that denounce feminism as means to perform femininity, see Dow “Spectacle,” “Fixing Feminism,” and “Miss America.” Also, see Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000): 80.

¹³ Ironically, Wynette did not stand by her man for long. She was married five times.

¹⁴ Sally Kempton, “Cutting Loose,” *Liberation Now* (1970): 53-57, as cited in Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s “Women’s Liberation an Oxymoron,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 80. “And I wonder always whether it is possible to define myself as a feminist revolutionary and still remain in any sense a wife. There are moments when I still worry that he will leave me, that he will come to need a woman less preoccupied with her own rights, and when I worry about that I also fear that no man will ever love me again, that *no man could ever love a woman who is angry*. And that fear is a great source of trouble to me, for it means that in certain fundamental ways I have not changed at all” (emphasis added).

¹⁵ Bonnie J. Dow, “Feminism, Miss America, and Media Mythology” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 145.

¹⁶ It is important to note that being a contemporary “stay at home mom” (SAHM) necessitates class privilege and financial stability. The success of “SAHMs” is also predicated on a marriage to a breadwinning spouse. Thus, “I chose to stay home and raise my children” is a multilayered declaration that elides many women’s realities who must work for pay outside the home. For example, women of color have historically had to work for

accepted premise that female country singers are and have been “people pleasing females” who merely “play by the rules of this conservative music genre” by eschewing or denouncing feminist sentiment.¹⁷ Yet as fans of Tammy Wynette can attest, many of her songs offered nuance to women’s experiences and articulated raw and rather provocative narratives; however, it was “Stand by Your Man” that defined her career and reinscribed people’s lasting impressions of women in country music.

1.2 COMPLICATING COUNTRY MUSIC’S “ORDINARY WOMEN”

The dismissal of Wynette is precisely why, as I argue, country music’s women of the second wave have been overlooked and marginalized as meaningful rhetors who negotiate double binds and various disciplinary mechanisms in this conservative music genre.¹⁸ Often panned as banal, inarticulate, and lowbrow, country music is rarely researched by scholars in the communication discipline. In fact, many representations that highlight the intersection of whiteness and low economic class have proven very unpopular among most cultural critics,

financial survival, in many cases inside white women’s homes. This necessary “invisible labor” behind the scenes is often silenced, since US working parents rarely speak of the nannies and domestic workers that make their professional lives possible. However, historically women who stayed home to care for their children did not assume class privilege. For example, Loretta Lynn, who lived in poverty, was a housewife for fifteen years before entering the music industry.

¹⁷ Beverly Keel, “The New Women’s Movement in Country Music,” *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music*, eds. Kristine McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 155.

¹⁸ See Pamela Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

especially regarding this population's use of music.¹⁹ Additionally, the presumption that women in country music are antifeminist likely informs feminist critics' lack of analyses that attend to country music's women. Further, these women's lyrics, public personae, and performances are overlooked as rich rhetorical texts. Yet even though the genre and its legendary women rarely garner academic attention, country music still grows as the United States' most popular and financially powerful music genre. Because of trends in mainstream media, it continues to grow.

1.3 COUNTRY MUSIC AND THE INTERSECTIONS OF AMERICAN MEDIA

Singing competitions shows are among the most watched prime-time television programs in the United States and most of them regularly feature country music. I argue that these shows have allowed this often relegated genre to become more accessible, trendy, and revered.²⁰ The hit prime-time drama, *Nashville*, which follows two female country music stars in different stages of

¹⁹ John Hartigan Jr., "Name Calling: Objectifying 'Poor White' and 'White Trash' in Detroit," *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, eds. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Routledge, 1997), 41-56. Barbara Ching, "Acting Naturally: Cultural Distinction and Critiques of Pure Country," *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, eds. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Routledge, 1997), 231-248. These are two contemporary examples of scholars who write on the unique intersections of poverty, whiteness, and regionalism. Also, this area of study highlights a significant linguistic trend in rural culture where the term "white trash" has come to be a marker of identity that to some is pejorative used to protect "good" whiteness, yet to others is a unifying identity akin to "redneck," which has the potential to foment solidarity and pride as indicated in the wildly popular 2005 song "Redneck Woman" by Gretchen Wilson.

²⁰ Television show *Grey's Anatomy* famously releases each episode's "sound track" via iTunes following the show. The artists who are featured often consist of unknown bands, independent artists, and the once budding stars such as Taylor Swift. Additionally, *Nashville* is a show that releases and sell its on-air performances as singles from the show. The show's songwriters and performers have also teamed up with Country Music Television (CMT) to air specials that feature the songs written especially for the show by actual country music song writers from Nashville, TN. This has arguably established a strong, loyal fan base that recognizes the "authenticity" of this music.

their careers, is one of the most notable examples of country music, and its industry, being depicted in mainstream media outlets.²¹ However, *American Idol* is arguably the prime-time show that introduced country music to new generations, not as a twangy, archaic joke, but as a relevant American genre.

American Idol judges and producers have touted that their show has garnered more votes than any presidential election, highlighting the widespread popularity of some US talent shows that fuse participatory audiences with a variety of music genres.²² However, it is worth noting that *American Idol*'s most successful winner, by far, is country music star Carrie Underwood. Even though *American Idol* is now off the air, singing competition show *The Voice* has taken its place as the dominant singing competition show on television. Further, its judge and on-air personality, country music star Blake Shelton, is incredibly popular. Dubbed “Nashville’s Prom King,” Shelton introduces country music as a traditionalist yet substantive music genre.²³ His imposing stature, prominent southern drawl, and simplistic, playful approach to music competition has been appealing to many fans, especially when framed as incongruous to the other judges from more liberal, transgressive, and “flashy” music genres like pop and R&B. In line with its growth on television, country music is also more accessible on the radio.²⁴ For example, New York City opened its first country music station in seventeen years in January 2013, citing a rise in country music’s popularity due to shows such as *Nashville* and *American*

²¹ This Emmy-nominated show was on ABC and is now on CMT (Country Music Television). It was created and is written by screenwriter Callie Khouri, who wrote the iconic 1991 film *Thelma & Louis*.

²² Alessandra Stanley, “Surprise (Well, Not Exactly)! ‘American Idol’ Finale Unfolds and Unfolds” *New York Times*. (May 25, 2006), accessed March 6 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/25/arts/television/25idol.html?_r=2&.&

²³ Reggie Ugwu, “Nashville’s Last Taboo? Country Music Stars are Tiptoeing around Trump,” *Buzzfeed* (Mar. 2, 2017), accessed March 4 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/reggieugwu/country-stars-and-donald-trump?utm_term=.blDg4q6RgP#.ijBNBOMJN3

²⁴ However, men’s music is far more likely to be heard on radio stations, since women’s air-time is still restricted because of myths promulgated by sexist industry gatekeepers. This is discussed in the chapter five.

Idol.²⁵ Additionally, political figures like President Reagan “adopted country music as the sound of traditional patriotism,” crowning it as America’s music.²⁶

Besides jazz, country or “country and western” music is distinctly American in its history and branding, highlighting why it is a significant channel of rhetorical discourse that shapes “Americanized” performances of gender, race, class, sexuality, and political leanings. Yet many scholars, in pursuit of “conceptual neatness” do not attend to these intersections and how they inform the shifting and contingent identities of women rhetors in country music.²⁷ Thus, upon further inspection, seemingly conservative “ordinary women” of country music, during the second wave of feminism in particular, have employed significant rhetorical strategies such as visual malleability, strategic silences, camp performance, invitational rhetoric, the comic frame, and feminine style etc., which have largely gone unnoticed. These strategies, some recognized and some I have named, have the potential to enrich rhetorical study and feminist criticism, by anchoring it in the lived experiences of masses of American women. In this dissertation, I uncover, explore, and articulate these strategies in order to highlight their impact for these seemingly poor, uneducated, “ordinary” southern women, who came to prominence as American musical icons by telling women’s stories through song. Specifically, these seemingly pedestrian women contributed to feminist discourse that reflected, and, in some instances demanded, political policy change that improved women’s lives.²⁸

²⁵ Ben Sisario, “Country Returns to City Radio: After 17 Years, a Home in New York. *New York Times* (Jan. 22, 2013), accessed March 2 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/23/business/media/nash-fm-brings-country-music-back-to-new-york-radio.html>

²⁶ Warren R. Hofstra, ed., *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 13.

²⁷ Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin, *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies*, eds. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 20.

²⁸ The rhetorical and political maneuvers enacted by disenfranchised women date back to other historical instances as well. See Ronald Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Voices without Votes: Women and Politics in Antebellum New England* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2010).

Due to the conservative climate of the country music industry, however, female country stars had to be judiciously tactful in making transgressive and feminist stands. In the four case studies that follow, I analyze how each woman rebelled, while also displaying public markers of femininity and respectability that would placate male gatekeepers and an assumed male audience. With attention to polysemy, I employ rhetorical criticism as a method to evaluate these four women's country music to uncover how seemingly innocuous rhetoric exposes multi-faceted narratives with enduring impact. In particular, my analyses incorporate scholarship on feminist theory, critical theory, Black feminist thought, camp, public memory, visual rhetoric, and public address. I analyze the public personae, lyrics, and public discourses of legendary singers Patsy Cline, Bobbie Gentry, Dolly Parton, and Loretta Lynn as rhetorical texts. Based on research questions that framed my analyses, this research project is driven by these three claims:

[1] Women's use of country music in the 1960s and early 1970s can be a key resource for understanding the complicated and competing beliefs, public memories, myths, politics, performances, and narratives in women's rhetoric.

[2] Women's lyrical narratives in country music reveal potentially feminist sentiments in many forms. These narratives allow for distinct, overlooked identifications between women and marginalized groups.

[3] The rhetorical strategies highlighted, named, and explored in this dissertation have the potential to influence and enrich rhetorical study and feminist criticism, as well as engage the margins of women's rhetoric that aimed to improve women's lives.

Through my analyses, my aim is to inspire conversations about women's historical use of country music as a significant, narrative medium of the second wave of feminism and potentially spark discussions about its political potential for the future.

1.4 DEFINITIONS

While women's country music has been overlooked as rhetorically significant, it offers unique examples of how women have employed strategies that would not alienate male gatekeepers and a predominantly conservative audience. To define how I am using the term strategy, I rely on Michel de Certeau's clarification between tactic and strategy in relation to power:

I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed...a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the conditions necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign

power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection.²⁹

Based on Certeau's differentiation between strategy and tactic, I recognize these women's rhetorical choices as *strategies* because they had access to power relationships, elements of control, and various forms of agency in their public performances, even though they were informed and influenced by patriarchal structures. As Certeau explains, "A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the bases for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it...Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model."³⁰ Very few rhetorical scholars, however, discuss performative or musical choices as *strategies*, but rather they recognize performers as reflecting or innovating trends of particular musical eras.³¹ Or scholars recognize identifications within groups, exposing how my approach in this project "clarifies confusions, [and] illuminates heretofore dark places in our science" that have not yet been explored.³²

Historically, the relationship between rhetoric, music lyrics, and musical qualities has been challenging for rhetorical critics of music to articulate. Deanna Sellnow and Timothy Sellnow's notable scholarship on the rhetoric of music is germane to this project and provides a helpful backdrop for analyzing selected music created by Cline, Gentry, Parton, and Lynn. Unlike earlier rhetorical scholarship on music that only focused on lyrics, Sellnow and Sellnow

²⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002): 35-37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, xix.

³¹ Lawrence Chenoweth, "The Rhetoric of Hope and Despair: A Study of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and the Jefferson Airplane," *American Quarterly* 23 (1971): 25-45. Danielle Simonelli, "Anarchy, Pop and Violence: Punk Rock Subculture and the Rhetoric of Class," *Contemporary British History* 16 (2002): 121-144. Albin J. Zak III, "Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix: Juxtaposition and Transformation 'All along the Watchtower,'" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2004): 599-644.

³² James Darsey, "Must We All be Rhetorical Theorists? An Anti-Democratic Inquiry," *Western Journal of Communication* 58 (1994): 176.

recognize both lyrical and musical components of song to highlight the rhetorical potential of music, especially in regards to identity-construction, persuasion, and gender.³³

Mary Bufwack and Robert Oermann's *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music 1800-2000* is a comprehensive documentation of the important and lengthy history of women in country music. They recognize the negotiations women have made within this evolving genre and are cognizant of sociopolitical issues that impacted these performers, such as "women's lib." The era during which the second wave of feminism or "women's liberation" took place was an important time for women in country music.³⁴ As many scholars can attest, the timeline that demarcates the beginning and end of the second wave of feminism is not entirely clear.

Kristan Poirot points out that Betty Friedan's 1963 book *Feminine Mystique* marks the beginning of "fruitful feminist activity" in the United States and is often regarded as sparking the women's liberation movement.³⁵ The second wave of feminism built momentum, which culminated in the germinal 1970 event: Women's Strike for Equality. This event ushered in greater influence, media visibility, and policy changes. Therefore, I am focusing the origins of my analyses within the time frame of 1963-1971. I include four of the most prolific, commercially successful, and culturally influential female country music stars of this era: Patsy

³³ Deanna Sellnow and Timothy Sellnow, "The 'Illusion of Life' Rhetorical Perspective: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Music as Communication," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18 (2001): 395-415. Deanna Sellnow, "Music as Persuasion: Refuting Hegemonic Masculinity in 'He Thinks He'll Keep Her,'" *Women's Studies in Communication* 22 (1999): 66-84. Deanna Sellnow, "Rhetorical Strategies of Continuity and Change in the Music of Popular Artists over Time," *Communication Studies* 47 (1996): 46-61. Deanna Sellnow and Timothy Sellnow, "John Corigliano's 'Symphony No. 1' as a Communicative Medium of the AIDS Crisis," *Communication Studies* 44 (1993): 87-101. Theodore Matula, "Contextualizing Musical Rhetoric: A Critical Reading of the Pixies' 'Rock Music,'" *Communication Studies* 51 (2009): 218-237.

³⁴ Women's Liberation, however, was and has been criticized for ignoring poor, disenfranchised, rural women – who unsurprisingly comprise much of country music's historical fan base. Thus, many feminist accounts of the second wave of feminist overlook these women and often assume they do not exercise feminist sensibilities.

³⁵ Kristan Poirot, "Mediating a Movement, Authorizing Discourse: Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, and Feminism's Second Wave," *Women's Studies in Communication* 27 (2004): 204. For a discussion of Women's Suffrage as the first wave of feminism, please see Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

Cline, Bobbie Gentry, Dolly Parton, and Loretta Lynn. However, I do not limit my analysis to only these years, since these artists' posthumous legacies and careers are still active.

1.5 SELECTION CRITERIA AND OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

While I do not critique these women themselves, I explore, champion, and challenge components of their personae as it is constructed and performed with and without their participation.³⁶ Further, I have selected these four rhetors for specific reasons.³⁷ Their careers produced critical acclaim in the form of Grammy Awards and other watershed moments for women in music. Second, they generated significant profits and engaged in commercial ventures that were and are substantial for female artists. Third, each woman developed her public persona with a deep commitment to her regional southern roots and personal style, while adapting to industry trends and political climates. Their ability to adapt and sustain enduring careers in a competitive and inimical industry makes these women particularly remarkable. A brief overview of these four women's accolades is worth including here.

³⁶ Inspiration for this distinction is from Dana L. Cloud, "Hegemony or Concordance? The Rhetoric of Tokenism in 'Oprah' Winfrey's Rags-to-Riches Biography," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13 (1996): 116.

³⁷ I use the term rhetor to define their role as persuasive speaking subjects. While there are many people involved in the production of every song, autobiography, performance etc. and their rhetoric is not created in isolation, I use singular rhetor akin to how Presidents, in the study of presidential rhetoric, are singular rhetors.

All four talented women garnered various accolades that have shaped their legacies. Patsy Cline was the first woman to perform at Carnegie Hall and to this day her song “Crazy” is the most requested and played song on US radio stations.³⁸ Bobbie Gentry’s #1 hit “Ode to Billie Joe” was hugely popular across genres and earned three Grammy Awards. Her songs “Ode to Billie Joe” and “Fancy” are covered by many contemporary artists. Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn are two of the most well-known country stars of all time and have won numerous music awards. They not only have careers that have continued into the 21st century with great success and loyal fan bases, they have ventured into other business outlets. Parton is owner of the theme park franchise Dollywood and is a two time Academy Award nominee for original song.³⁹ Lynn was the inspiration for the Academy Award winning film *Coal Miner’s Daughter* and she has teamed up with alternative rocker Jack White to bring country infused music to other genres and younger generations, which has earned them two Grammy Awards. In 2013, Lynn was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Both women are also philanthropists who target rural poverty in northern Appalachia, a region where they both grew up.⁴⁰ While these four rhetors share things in common, their lyrics, discourse, public memories, and personae allow for distinct and layered rhetorical analyses.

Patsy Cline died tragically in a plane crash at the age of thirty in 1963, allowing for her posthumous legacy to be shaped and reshaped as a fascinating rhetorical text that speaks to visions of Americana. Public memory, or a shared sense of the past, is significant to discussions

³⁸ Museum Exhibit, *Becoming Patsy Cline*, 2014, Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, Winchester: VA.

³⁹ Parton was nominated for an Academy Award for best song for “9 to 5” (1981) for the film *9 to 5*, in which Parton starred as a main character. She was nominated for “Travelin’ Thru” (2006) for the film *Transamerica*.

⁴⁰ Parton funds the Imagination Library, which provides poor children with books. Lynn has fundraised to fund free medical clinics and assist indigenous communities.

of country music because it is a genre that often champions “pastness.”⁴¹ Sheila Simon posits that country music today “reflects yesterday’s values,” substantiating its contemporary conservative connotation as perhaps stuck in the past. As a characteristic of the genre, lyrics focus on problems, but characters often look backward, “pining for some kind of tradition” to fix it.⁴² Therefore, it is not surprising that country music norms encourage strict, traditional, gender performances for women that often require heightened “bright-eyed” femininity to fulfill expectations of an assumed male gaze dating back to historical notions of the “Southern Lady.”⁴³

Ashli Quesinberry Stokes traces how the South’s history and traditions often thwarted gender transgressions, especially feminist sentiments. Specifically, the myth of the “Southern Lady,” as a complement to the “Cult of True Womanhood,” was often seen as antithetical to feminist ideals.⁴⁴ The “Southern Lady” represented female subordination as well as the need for separate spheres for men (public) and women (private).⁴⁵ Biblical scripture was often employed to encourage wives to “submit,” reinforcing notions of white womanhood that required her to be “dainty, demure, beautiful, submissive, obedient, self-denying, innocent, and dependent.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ekaterina Haskins, “Put Your Stamp on History: The USPS Commemorative Program *Celebrate the Century* and Postmodern Collective Memory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 1-18.

⁴² Sheila Simon, “Greatest Hits: Domestic Violence in American Country Music,” *Oregon Law Review* 2 (2003): 1114.

⁴³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Feminist Film Theory*, ed. Sue Thornham (NY: NYU Press, 1975), 62. Bonnie J. Dow, “Spectacle, Spectatorship, and Gender Anxiety in Television News Coverage of the 1970 Women’s Strike for Equality” *Communication Studies* 50 (1999): 151.

⁴⁴ Ashli Quesinberry Stokes, “Constituting Southern Feminists: Women’s Liberation Newsletters in the South” *Southern Communication Journal* 70 (2005): 95.

⁴⁵ See Elizabeth Varon, *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew, A Union Agent in the Heart of the Confederacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Joan Cashin *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South*, ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ Ashli Quesinberry Stokes, “Constituting Southern Feminists: Women’s Liberation Newsletters in the South” *Southern Communication Journal* 70 (2005): 95.

These strict gender expectations and performances of “respectability” also function to oppress and alienate women of color.⁴⁷

Southern “norms” alienated Black women who saw little of their lived realities reflected in second wave feminist appeals, let alone in country music.⁴⁸ As Stokes articulates, it is easy to form an essentializing opinion of women in the South as perhaps less feminist in contrast to those in other regions of the US. For example, most southern white women were historically supportive of (or silent about) slavery and racism, which afforded white women gender and race privileges.⁴⁹ By remaining silent on issues that impacted women of color disproportionately, white women fostered a climate in which Black female bodies were understood as property of both Black and white men.⁵⁰ This is an enduring stigma that ranges from contempt for the “Southern Lady” to contemporary frustrations in white women’s liberal feminism, which is often seen as problematically homogenous.

To complicate this “homogeny” of whiteness, I think intersectionally to reveal the complexity of country music and women’s roles within it as a subordinate group.⁵¹ According to Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin, a scholar who employs an intersectional approach must “select

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 44. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

⁴⁸ I use the inclusive term “Black” to recognize those of the African diaspora who live in the US (e.g. Afro Latinx, African Americans etc. and those who may not identify as American).

⁴⁹ Abigail Selzer King, “United through an ‘Unfailing Bond’: A Rhetorical History of Klanswomen’s Organizing in the 1920s” (PhD diss., Purdue University 2013). One of the most significant privileges afforded white women was the right to vote, as they sought white supremacy leaders to aid in women’s suffrage at the expense of Black women. Also, Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman” speech articulates the disparity between white women’s historically gendered privileges compared to Black women. Black women, rendered unfeminine, were historically expected to work right alongside men before and after the abolishment of slavery. See Nell Irvin Painter, “Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth’s Knowing and Becoming Known,” *Journal of American History* 81 (Sept. 1994): 461-92.

⁵⁰ Maxine Williams, “Black Women and the Struggle for Liberation,” *Black Women’s Manifesto* (NY: Third World Women’s Alliance, 1970): 11.

⁵¹ While widely used and championed as an ideal approach for contemporary feminist and anti-racist thought, intersectionality has been critiqued. For example, see Robyn Wiegman’s chapter “Critical Kinship: Universal Aspirations and Intersectional Judgments,” in her *Object Lessons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) and Jennifer Nash, “Re-thinking Intersectionality,” *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1-15.

a communicative moment...reflect on who is being named, what name is being given or offered, who has the power to do so, and what privileges exist that sanction this naming.”⁵² As Patricia Hill Collins argues, the Eurocentric masculinist knowledge-validation process determines who can be “knowers” and this process sustains ideological hegemony that excludes women and African Americans from contributing to meaningful public discourse.⁵³ This exclusion substantiates the matrix of domination that marginalizes those outside traditional locations of privilege. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s germinal 1991 work highlights how feminist and anti-racist discourses promote essentializing tendencies that neglect “intragroup difference,” which shroud significant intersectional oppressions that limit women’s access to resources such as legal protection and recognition. This intragroup difference is significant to this project as ideological divisions are drawn within the second wave of feminism between feminists and “ordinary women,” white, lesbian, and Black feminists, and liberal and radical feminists, for example. Further, while all four case studies represent some similarities, I aim to draw out nuance and complexity in each woman’s lived experience by foregrounding her own narratives. However, whiteness often operates in country music as an unexamined marker of women’s homogenous likeness, unequivocal “proof” of American citizenship, and a stepping stone to respectability.⁵⁴

Remembered as raucous, promiscuous, and rebellious, Patsy Cline did not adhere to markers of white respectability. More specifically, she did not fit into country music’s

⁵² Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin, *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studios* (Albany, NY: State University of New York), 17.

⁵³ Patricia Hill Collins, “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,” *Signs* 14 (1989): 761.

⁵⁴ For germinal works on whiteness, see Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2007); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006). For whiteness studies and music, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 2013), and Pamela Brown Lavitt, “First of the Red Hot Mamas: ‘Coon Shouting’ and the Jewish Ziegfeld Girl,” *American Jewish History* 87 (1999): 253-90.

construction of the “girl singer,” the reputable prototype deemed valuable by male music producers and consumers. Called euphemistically “a woman ahead of her time,” Cline did not obey what bell hooks calls the bourgeois decorum expected of “good white girls.”⁵⁵ While she did not fit into country music’s vision of respectable white femininity, she developed a lucrative and critically acclaimed career as a polished pop singer. Yet, after Cline’s death in 1963, her career was largely dormant only to reemerge in the 1980s as a popularized “country” star available to be visually manipulated to fit various groups’ rhetorical needs.⁵⁶ In my analysis, I articulate three myths about Cline’s posthumous legacy that are incongruous with primary source material to reveal how white, ageless female “eye-cons” become desirable visual rhetoric since they are young, malleable, and help reinforce whiteness as Americana. Cline, like Rosie the Riveter, has become a powerful tool because in many ways neither construction existed in the way audiences assume.⁵⁷

Like Cline who died young, famed singer and songwriter Bobbie Gentry also disappeared from the music industry, leaving a mysterious legacy of strategic silences. While still alive and well, Gentry chose to leave show business in 1978 after attaining financial stability and indicating her disillusionment with the demanding industry. Despite her disappearance from the public eye, Gentry’s masterful Southern Gothic lyrics have an enduring rhetorical impact. For example, her lyrics signal the stifling effect of rural stoicism, an emotionally repressed steadfastness predominantly affecting men. The strict gender expectations of rural identity

⁵⁵ Dreama Moon, “White Enculturation and Bourgeois Ideology: The Discursive Production of ‘Good (White) Girls’” in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*, eds. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 182. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End, 1989). bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁵⁶ Joli Jensen, “Posthumous Patsy Clines,” in *Afterlife as Afterimage: Understanding Posthumous Fame*, eds. Steve Jones and Joli Jensen (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

⁵⁷ James J. Kimble and Lester C. Olson, “Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconceptions in J. Howard Miller’s ‘We Can Do It!’ Poster,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9 (2006): 550.

created obstacles for transgressions in the South and isolated family members, which Gentry explores in her #1 smash hit “Ode to Billie Joe.” Additionally, she infers topics through silence and has never told what the characters in her song threw off the Tallahatchie Bridge. Even when male gatekeepers withheld contracts, convinced the song endorsed abortion, Gentry never said a word – spurring speculation and enduring fondness for the cryptic ballad.

Most feminist scholarship champions and prioritizes the cultivation of voice; however, I argue that it is Gentry’s strategic silences that enthymematically encourage audiences to read between the lines. Gentry’s approach was effective in the “transformation of silence into language and action.”⁵⁸ Relying on speeches by Audre Lorde and scholarship on the problems and potentials of silence, I explore how Gentry’s persona and lyrics interacted to produce significant discussions about women’s lived realities in rural poverty and feminist claims of the second wave. Gentry, however, was often misunderstood by both conservative gatekeepers as well as feminists showing the limits imposed on women who are perceived as “outsiders” in country music.

A woman who has evaded most of the limits imposed on women in country music is camp icon, Dolly Parton. Despite the nudie suits, bedazzled belt buckles, and voluminous hair, country music has been overlooked by critical scholars as a site of camp – full of artifice and gendered exaggeration. Using traditional and contemporary scholarship on camp and queer theory as a framework, I argue that Parton’s masterful negotiations of camp binaries are an exemplar of invitational rhetoric. As an alternative to the traditional paternalistic rhetorics, Foss and Griffin introduce invitational rhetoric, which “expands the scope of rhetorical theory and

⁵⁸ Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language into Action,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: Crossings, 1984), 40.

enhances the discipline's ability to explain diverse communicative phenomena successfully."⁵⁹ Additionally, I highlight Parton's rhetorical strategy of a "ghost husband" as a public marker of respectability, which affords her freedoms in the public sphere. Further, my exploration highlights the potential of camp as a powerful resource for mobilizing solidarity among marginalized groups. In effect, Parton is never rendered "too much," but an authentic star who fosters strong identifications with disparate fan bases.

The final case study explores another prolific artist, Loretta Lynn, who developed undeniably strong identifications with her female fans. Lynn began her Nashville career through violent posturing in an era I call "militant matrimony." While many scholars look to music genres such as rap, rock, and hip-hop for explorations of gender and violence, few ever engage the deeply violent roots of country music. More specifically, feminine violence in music is rarely, if ever, explored. By exploring the murder ballad as an unproductive tragic frame, I highlight Lynn's innovative employment of the comic frame, which allows audiences to see the ways an error "may be corrected rather than punished."⁶⁰ This way, Lynn encourages audiences to reflect upon sexist assumptions and dark topics such as physical violence and marital rape. Lynn's music, complemented by her infantilized, "little lady" persona, is never interpreted as threatening until later in her career. Thus, Lynn was able to take empowering stands in her songs, through the comic frame and feminine style, which demonstrate her growth as an artist, reluctant feminist, and empowered woman.

Bonnie Dow and Mari Boor Tonn explain that feminine style has the potential to "produce discourse that displays a personal tone, uses personal experience, anecdotes and

⁵⁹ Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 2.

⁶⁰ Barry Brummett, "Burkean Comedy and Tragedy, Illustrated in Reactions to the Arrest of John Delorean," *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984): 219.

examples as evidence, exhibits inductive structure, emphasizes audience participation, and encourages identifications between audience and speaker.”⁶¹ Lynn explains that her largely female fan base is deeply loyal because “That’s who I’m singing about and singing to during my shows. And the girls know it.”⁶² As an explicit supporter of feminist sentiments later in her career, Lynn’s popularity did not waiver among her fan base, but she was perceived as a threat to the music industry – exposing the rhetorical limits afforded women in country music. This marks a salient turn in country music in which women, in fear of backlash, shy away from important political sentiments.

In my conclusion, I point out the apolitical climate of today’s country music and explore its role as a “safe space” for white masculinity and conversely an inhospitable place for women and people of color. Most notably, the November 2016 performance of country group the Dixie Chicks and musical icon Beyoncé at the Country Music Awards exposes the rhetorical limits enforced by country music fans, which unveils deeply rooted prejudice that informs the stifling norms of today’s country music. Through this contemporary example, I illuminate the problematic ubiquity of “bro-country” as a response to country music’s contemporary identity as an apolitical, “safe space” for unchallenged white masculinity. This contemporary climate negates the rich and noteworthy history of country music’s legendary second wave women and has the potential to relegate them back to the margins.

⁶¹ Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn, “‘Feminine Style’ and Political Judgment in the Rhetoric of Ann Richards,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 287.

⁶² Loretta Lynn and George Vecsey, *Loretta Lynn: Coal Miner’s Daughter* (Chicago: Vintage Books, 1976), 84.

2.0 CHAPTER 2: PATSY CLINE

2.1 A RHETORICAL EYE-CON: THE AGELESS AMERICANA OF PATSY CLINE

In an era in which archives are digitized, dissertations and books are downloaded in seconds and flash drives replace filing cabinets, memory has seemingly lost its utility as one of Cicero's Five Canons.⁶³ According to visual rhetoric scholars Vivian and Demo, memory is more often associated with computer hardware and software than anything else.⁶⁴ In fact, with the influx of big data analysis and the digital humanities, "memory" shifts away from its canonical sense, as a necessary individuated skill of recall for oratory, to a more disembodied mechanical entity. However, memory takes on many definitions. As a personal humanistic ability, people often cherish their ability to recall fond memories, making the fear of memory loss and traumatic diseases such as Alzheimer's and Dementia a valid concern. More broadly, however, humanistic memory is still deeply relevant to academic inquiry as an exercise in public

⁶³ See Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, "The Rise of Rome and the Rhetoric of Cicero," in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, 2nd ed., eds., (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 34.

⁶⁴ Anne Teresa Demo and Bradford Vivian, eds., *Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form: Sighting Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

collectivity. Memory, as a shared cultural phenomenon, is integral to the study of communication and rhetoric both as a classical canon and as “public memory.”⁶⁵

Defined broadly as a shared sense of the past, public memory is strategic. Bodnar notes that public memory is a symbol system that “people can use ... as a cognitive device to mediate competing interpretations and privilege some explanations over others.”⁶⁶ People construct shared memory, and while often contested, uphold it through visual manifestations that reinscribe a particular vision of what was. As Prelli points out, “what looks to us like reality is constituted rhetorically” through forms of display that “make claims upon us.”⁶⁷ Further, public memory becomes “an argument about the interpretation of reality” rather than an apolitical reflection of it.⁶⁸ Thus, the process of merely getting remembered throughout the expanse of history “takes on a politics of its own.”⁶⁹ I argue that public memory, as a collective process, is a rhetorical strategy that organizes experiences and narratives to fulfill needs of a given audience. Patsy Cline’s posthumous public memory is a fitting case study in understanding this phenomenon because she is not commemorated in a museum or place, as many studies of public memory are. Rather, Cline is a visual and musical icon comprised of collective ideas about her,

⁶⁵ Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian Ott, eds., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, eds. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 5. Greg Dickinson, Brian Ott, and Eric Aoki, “Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum,” *Western Journal of Communication* 69 (2005): 88-9. Stephen H. Brown, “Reading, Rhetoric and the Texture of Public Memory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 237-65. Kendall R. Phillips, ed., *Framing Public Memory* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

⁶⁶ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14.

⁶⁷ Lawrence Prelli, ed., *Rhetorics of Display* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2006), 1.

⁶⁸ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-14.

⁶⁹ Stephen H. Browne, “Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Commemoration,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 (1999), 169.

which are not rooted anywhere in particular, even in her hometown of Winchester, VA, whose residents resist creation of any permanent Patsy Cline museum.⁷⁰

Communication scholar and Patsy Cline enthusiast Joli Jensen recalls that she could not find a single picture of Cline while researching her as a dissertation topic in 1978. Now, however, Cline is not only a “country music icon” but is taken seriously as an object of scholarship, because of her far-reaching influence in American popular culture. Yet for those who study her biographical career or interpret her songs and vocal range, they overlook her strategic malleability in public memory due to her ephemeral life and career. In short, she can become whatever disparate audiences need her to be. This malleability has led to her sustained posthumous career during which she has sold more country music albums than any other artist on her MCA label – alive or dead.⁷¹

Cline died in a plane crash outside Nashville at the age of thirty. While there are many examples of singers who died prematurely [e.g., Hank Williams (1953), Billie Holiday (1959), Jimi Hendrix (1970), Janis Joplin (1970), Elvis Presley (1977), John Lennon (1980), Karen Carpenter (1983), Kurt Cobain (1994), Amy Winehouse (2011)], Cline did not die of a drug overdose, declining health, or suicide. Therefore, her audiences never perceived her to be

⁷⁰ Cline’s home that she shared with her mother in Winchester, VA was restored and opened for tours in 2011. The house features some of Cline’s costumes, furniture and photographs. Visited by the author, August 2015. In 2017, construction continues on a permanent Patsy Cline museum in Nashville, TN. Although, most of the people involved in this project never knew Patsy Cline while she was alive – showing a noteworthy disconnect between her life and her now distinct and noteworthy public memory. Yet, according to Cline’s brother-in-law and the staff that curate her home, Cline’s hometown is still resistant to breaking ground on a permanent museum in Winchester, Virginia.

⁷¹ Mary Bufwack and Robert Oermann. *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music 1800-2000*. (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), 208. Some other artists outside country on MCA’s label are blues great B.B. King, Southern rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd, pop icon Cher, and contemporary hip hop group The Roots. The caliber of these MCA performers exposes the significance of Cline’s commercial legacy as an MCA artist.

troubled or self-destructive but rather a wholesome, “soft-shell crooner” merely frozen in time.⁷² Based on my popular press, academic, and archival research, there were no competing public images or narratives of her personal woes to challenge her uncomplicated image. She is also distinct in comparison to other musical icons of her era, such as Hank Williams, because of her *visual* presence on television. Williams died in 1953 of a drug overdose before the mid-1950s boom in television viewing; only one video recording of him performing is available online to lay audiences. Elvis Presley, similarly to Cline, was a deeply visual icon due to his transition from a Mississippi Delta blues singer to a Rock n’ Roll crossover star made famous from visits to the *Ed Sullivan Show* starting in 1956, which are still widely available and viewed regularly.⁷³ Television, thus, becomes a very salient component of Cline’s contested legacy in contemporary public memory as the source of her visual presence. Further, Patsy Cline, the rhetorical *eye-con*, is a worthy case study in visual rhetoric because she is a malleable figure influenced by region, whiteness, and gender.

While Nashville, Tennessee is credited as “Music City, U.S.A.” and the epicenter of country music, Washington District of Columbia (DC) had a very significant impact on the

⁷² Richard Peterson, “The Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music,” in *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, ed., Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 247.

⁷³ Additionally, cultural critics and music historians now recognize Elvis Presley as appropriating music written, reworked, and recorded by Black blues musicians. For example, “Ain’t nothing but a hound dog” was first performed in 1952 by Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thornton, a Black woman. Written by two white Jewish men and stylized by Thornton, the song was then reworked and repackaged by white producers for Presley. However, Presley copied many of Thornton’s stylistic approaches to the song. Presley rose in popularity and acquired significant wealth by, in part, by taking Black performers musical artistry for white audiences’ consumption, without paying proper royalties or giving credit. Among Black audiences, Bertrand argues that “Elvis was less about innovation and more about continuation, namely the perpetual exploitation and misappropriation of black labor and artistry.” As one music critic noted, had Chuck Berry been white, he would have taken Elvis’s throne as the “King of Rock n’ Roll” and worn his crown well. Michael T. Bertrand, “Elvis Presley and the Politics of Popular Memory,” *Southern Cultures* 13 (2007): 62.

music career and subsequent public memory of singer Patsy Cline.⁷⁴ Born Virginia Patterson Hensley, to her sixteen-year-old mother Hilda in 1932, “Ginny” dropped out of high school when her father left the family, in order to support her single mother. She worked in a slaughterhouse, as a waitress, but, most importantly, sang in local Moose halls, fire stations and regional honky tonks.⁷⁵ In 1952, Ginny was renamed “Patsy” by her manager Bill Peer, who was older, married, and her occasional lover. In 1953, she married Gerald Cline.⁷⁶ Thus, “Patsy Cline” was a regional “hillbilly music” singer, on the margins, with meager success until Connie B. Gay, the host of regional TV show *Town and Country Jamboree*, hired her as a “girl singer” in 1954 as country music boomed.⁷⁷

Conveniently located in Winchester, Virginia, Cline lived locally within the DC “metro” television region, which had a major impact on the visual spread of country music. She performed on-air every Saturday night for a year and her visibility on *Town and Country Jamboree* cemented her status as a musical fixture in the thriving Washington DC country music television circuit. During this time, Gay is credited as rebranding hillbilly music as *country* music – exposing its rural regional origins despite its popularity in cities like DC.

Washington DC was significant to the early televised performances of country, but also country music’s reach to disparate audiences. Specifically DC occupies a liminal space – named

⁷⁴ Douglas Gomery, “Patsy Cline: A Television Star” in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. Warren Hofstra (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 108-127.

⁷⁵ Her father deserted the family and did not return. Out of necessity, Ginny went to work at the age of fourteen. Ginny and her mother were very close as the parental figures to Cline’s younger brother and sister.

⁷⁶ The marriage lasted four years and ended in divorce. Many claim that Gerald Cline wanted Patsy to be a housewife; however, Patsy Cline wanted to sing professionally. They had no children. Interestingly, Cline’s second husband, Charlie Dick, insisted Cline was “just an ordinary girl. She loved home life, you know, cookin’, cleanin’, lookin’ after her family. I didn’t make her. Sure we argued, we were fightin’ all the time, we had a passionate relationship.” This demonstrates a theme of conflicting narratives, through which people make claims *about* Cline, her identity, (dis)likes, and role as wife, mother, and star. See Jim White, “Is Charlie Making Patsies of Lesbians?” *The Independent* (Apr. 16, 1993), 18.

⁷⁷ Many label Connie B. Gay “the founding father” of country music since he supposedly coined the term “country music.” This genre was previously known as “hillbilly music.”

the “most northern city of the South” or “the most southern city of the North.”⁷⁸ I argue that DC, as the US Capital, is significant in how we now see country music as “America’s music” despite Jazz being touted as the only “American-made” music. Further, Washington DC grew exponentially in the 1950s, due to the influx of white rural agrarian workers who sought work in the city. These homesick transplants voraciously consumed country music that reminded them of home. In fact, “hillbilly cruises” sailed down the Potomac as DC became the second fastest growing city in the United States.⁷⁹ However, in order to resonate with larger audiences in diverse regions, country music producers and television hosts pushed for a more generic, palatable pop sounding music as the television broadcasting’s reach spread westward. Cline’s performances reflect this shift.

Cline’s successes as a “girl singer” on *Town and Country Jamboree* and guest appearances on *Town and Country Time* were noteworthy but soon ended. Gay supposedly fired Cline because of her “unreliability, rebelliousness, and drinking.”⁸⁰ Jobless, Cline appeared in 1957 on the *Arthur Godfrey Show* in his coveted national talent competition. In an effort to win, Cline’s performance echoed the steady shift away from outdated country music to palatable crowd-pleasing pop music. Cline’s producer Owen Bradley “remade” her by ditching her beloved cowgirl outfits, made with care and precision by her mother, in favor of a refined blue sheath dress. She sang in a pop style without any yodeling, or hints of twang. Lastly, she delivered a smooth and polished rendition of “Walking after Midnight” – a song she hated.⁸¹ Her

⁷⁸ Warren R. Hofstra, *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 78.

⁷⁹ Douglas Gomery, “Patsy Cline: A Television Star,” in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. Warren Hofstra. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 115.

⁸⁰ Joli Jensen, “Patsy Cline, Musical Negotiation, and the Nashville Sound,” in *All that Glitters: Country Music in America*, ed. George Lewis (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993).

⁸¹ The song’s writer, Don Hecht, recalls that Cline dismissed the song as a “little ole pop songs” with weak lyrics that “didn’t have any ‘balls.’” Jocelyn R. Neal, “Nothing but a Little Ole Pop Song: Patsy Cline’s Music Style

revisions worked because she “won by a landslide.”⁸² Her shift from country singer to cosmopolitan pop performer fit trends and audience needs, a conversion similarly enacted on poor rural Delta blues singer Elvis Presley who became the glamorous and provocative televisual icon of Rock n’ Roll. Because of Cline’s triumph on the *Arthur Godfrey Show*, she became a star; however, she resented how she got there – “selling out” as a malleable crossover singer who abandoned her musical roots. By the following year in 1958, televisions were in 90% of DC living rooms, and Cline’s prominence as a “pop” star only grew.⁸³ Cline’s label as a “pop star” during her life highlights the inconsistencies of her constructed public memory, which leads unwitting fans to celebrate her as an “authentic country star.” This inconsistency, and its rhetorical implications, warrants further analysis.

While discrepancies between celebrities’ public life versus private aspirations is not particularly surprising or academically noteworthy, Cline’s sustained malleability is significant to discussions of visual rhetoric and specifically to critical feminist scholarship that engages issues of visual culture. In this chapter, I analyze the visual portrayal of Cline during three distinct periods of her contested legacy, in order to discuss the ways her untimely death negates her exposure to the ageist double bind and allows her to be used strategically in the (re)emerging whiteness of Americana. In doing so, I aim to expand upon visual rhetoric and feminist scholarship by introducing Cline as an example of a “rhetorical eye-con.” I define this concept as a way to identify a mediated public figure whose life and pop culture career were very successful but shortened due to tragedy, disallowing competing *visual* narratives that would complicate

and the Evolution of Genre in the 1950’s,” in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. Warren Hofstra. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 129.

⁸² Warren R. Hofstra, *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 78.

⁸³ Douglas Gomery, “Patsy Cline: A television star,” in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. Warren Hofstra (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 111.

their persona. Further, the “rhetorical eye-con” becomes untethered and audiences may use the figure rhetorically in a variety of ways and imbue the figure with various meanings. In effect, “we” as audiences and publics rhetorically frame the figure in ways that are misleading, false and act as a “con.” Two examples of “rhetorical eye-cons” that may spur my future research are singer Selena Quintanilla and rapper Tupac Shakur, who rose to iconic stature especially upon their untimely murders at the ages of 23 (1995) and 25 (1996) respectively. While influential in their life, their posthumous legacies have taken on new almost mythic meanings to various publics who use them rhetorically to fill audiences’ needs. Yet, these two figured function differently than Cline. Quintanilla, as a Mexican-American, and Shakur, an African-American, these figures are never framed as “universal” revealing why Cline’s music genre and whiteness inform her popular mediated presence as transcendent – yet still a musical myth.

First, I discuss visual rhetoric, public memory, and the influence of popular culture as civil religion. Then, I employ rhetorical criticism informed by visual and feminist scholarship to analyze noteworthy artifacts from three distinct periods of Clines life in order to highlight how her visual construction creates three myths. 1. her “country” career as a girl singer (1954-1963), 2. her 1980’s resurgence as patriot / feminist (1980-1988) and 3. her enduring afterimage as a “universal” icon of Americana (1993 through today). I will examine her album covers while she was alive, her 1988 greatest hits album cover that reintroduced her to many contemporary audiences, and her 1993 US Postage Stamp as a nod to white Americana. Through my analysis, I point out the rhetorical framing of her image in relation to political trends, commodity culture, gender, race, age, and the changing sensibilities and definitions of authentic country music. In conclusion, I illuminate her rhetorical utility as malleable Americana, successfully allowing her

public memory to conflate whiteness with “American,” while evading disciplinary mechanisms that often render aging women publically invisible.

2.2 VISUAL RHETORIC, PUBLIC MEMORY, AND CIVIL RELIGION

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual rhetoric, or the means to critically engage with “non-oratorical” forms,⁸⁴ makes space to interrogate what Wendy Hesford calls ocular epistemology – the “seeing is believing” model of proof.⁸⁵ However, this proof is often rhetorically constructed and is particularly salient when cultures develop visual narratives to construct public memory. Public memory, as means to address the rhetorical display of culturally agreed upon events of the past, highlights the role of the visual in contemporary rhetorical criticism. In fact, Prelli argues that visual rhetoric or rhetorics of display are the “dominant rhetoric of our times.”⁸⁶ Gillis illuminates that memory is losing its precise meaning amidst “growing political power;” therefore, “memory work” has largely become open to many of those outside of elitist positions, shifting national remembrance to local communities and to individual homes. He writes that “every attic is an archive, every

⁸⁴ Lester C. Olson, “Intellectual and Conceptual Resources for Visual Rhetoric: A Re-Examination of Scholarship since 1950,” *Review of Communication* 7 (2007): 1-20.

⁸⁵ Wendy Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3, 29.

⁸⁶ Lawrence Prelli, *Rhetorics of Display*, ed. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 2006), 9.

living room is a museum” – often turning the “democratic” benefits of memory into an individual burden to capture, preserve, and display one’s experiences as memories.⁸⁷ Gillis explains that “the past has become so distant and the future so uncertain that we can no longer be sure what to save, so we save everything,” despite technological advancements that have made the past more accessible.⁸⁸ One of these noteworthy contemporary technological advancements is the smart phone, a device that may promote the burdensome anxiety Gillis references. Many smartphone users express pressure to share their experiences in real time or artistically archive them for posterity.⁸⁹ Yet as Haskins argues, there is a tension between official public memory and vernacular interest, which often spurs commodity narratives, as it did in her research on commemorative postage stamps, which I will revisit.⁹⁰

Haskins makes sense of this tension between official and vernacular memory through Robert Bellah’s work on “civil religion.”⁹¹ Bellah argues that “civil religion” takes form when local vernacular beliefs, faith, consumerism, and practices help people to connect with official national narratives. For example, State-sanctioned US holidays such as Memorial Day or Independence Day often shift into opportunities for consumerism and a display of overt patriotism in line with official national narratives. Many people purchase and adorn American flag merchandise and partake in “American” practices, such as grilling meats in grassy spaces

⁸⁷ John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3, 14.

⁸⁸ Gillis, “Memory and Identity,” 15.

⁸⁹ From this pressure, I argue that many interesting terms and phenomena have arisen. Many scholars talk of social media users’ FOMO, or “Fear of Missing Out,” as the impetus to always participate in and document experiences to feel a shared sense of belonging. See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). Others feel that if they did not capture the event in pictures, it somehow did not exist. Thus, people are often compelled to capture events in photos and this “burdensome” process, which Gillis speaks to back in 1994, continually evolves with technological advancements such as the smart phone.

⁹⁰ Ekaterina Haskins, “Put Your Stamp on History: The USPS Commemorative Program *Celebrate the Century* and Postmodern Collective Memory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003): 1-18.

⁹¹ Robert Neelly Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96 (1967): 1-21.

(e.g. cooking out with family and friends) and igniting combustible light spectacles (i.e. enjoying fireworks). In effect, people “prove” their citizenship through vernacular beliefs, consumerism, and rituals. These American rituals tacitly serve to accept war and subsequent fatalities as necessary, normative “sacrifice” that preserve “God given” freedoms – a sentiment that is not to be questioned only commemorated over a long weekend. While many likely agree that military sacrifice should be commemorated, many also insist that protesting war and normalized violence is *un-American*, revealing key components of what patriotism has come to mean for many, both in a vernacular (personal) and official (national) sense. Thus, the “collective” US narrative promoted by Memorial Day and Independence Day is both official and vernacular public memory, inextricably linked to the commodification of patriotism. Further, these “universal” American narratives become part of civil religion.⁹² Coined in 1967, Bellah defines civil religion as “the myths that have developed to help us interpret who and what we are in America” particularly in times of social upheavals.⁹³

More specifically, Meizel argues that patriotic music helps to “make” people American. Famed songwriter Irving Berlin, a Jewish Russian immigrant, not only wrote the legendary “White Christmas,” but also penned “God Bless America” in 1917. Rosen argues that, through music, he and other Jews who wrote pop songs for Vaudeville stages “turned themselves into Americans.”⁹⁴ More explicitly, Berlin followed up this song with the instructively titled “Let’s All be Americans Now” amidst the peril of WWI. Berlin’s “God Bless America” fomented the

⁹² While North, Central, and South Americans are all “Americans,” I use the term in this project to reference those living within the United States of America who identify as citizens. Many attest that July 4, 1776 did not mark *their* independence, because their ancestors were enslaved, victims of genocide or alienation at the hands of colonists, or not afforded the same legal rights as property owning white men. While unpopular, this sentiment challenges the reductionist framing of official “national” memory that glosses over historical complexities.

⁹³ Robert Neelly Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

⁹⁴ Jody Rosen, *White Christmas: The Story of an American Song* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 12.

recognizable surge in religion-themed patriotic sentiment and its role as civil religion. The Star Spangled Banner was officially named the US Anthem in 1931. President Roosevelt foresaw the defeat of Hitler during WWII as a “victory for religion” signaling the conflation of military victory and religious duty.⁹⁵ Further, religion – specifically Christianity – was conflated with citizenship when an “atheistic American [was] a contradiction in terms.”⁹⁶ President Eisenhower added “under God” to the pledge of allegiance in 1954, and then he declared that “In God We Trust” would replace “E Pluribus Unum” as a national motto in 1956. Eisenhower’s decisions functioned to distance the US from “Godless communists” during the Red Scare.⁹⁷ Thus, US anxieties during conflict revisit religious sentiment and routinely do so through song.⁹⁸ As David Chidester argues, scholars largely overlook how much popular culture has to do with how Americans think about America.⁹⁹ Therefore, I look to Patsy Cline’s career as a case study in public memory, which promotes myths about her career as a country singer, her posthumous 1980s legacy as a malleable narrative appropriated by Christian conservatives and feminists, and her contemporary fame as a “universal” icon used in the proliferation of white Americana, visually and rhetorically rooted in “how Americans think about America.”

⁹⁵ Stephen Bates, “Godless Communism and its Legacies,” *Society* 41 (2004): 32. While religion has been invoked for centuries as rationale for war, colonialism, slavery, and other exercises in domination and brutality, WWII and its use of popular music and national sentiment to promote a rather uncomplicated good vs. evil narrative was very successful. Hitler was an undeniable monster. See Edward J. Ingebretsen, “Monster-Making: A Politics of Persuasion,” *Journal of American Culture* 21 (1998): 25-34. Therefore, those who were called upon to combat this evil are remembered as “the greatest generation.” Additionally, this good/evil binary purports an uncomplicated narrative that is explicitly laced with Christianity, patriotism, and US ideals of religious freedom despite ongoing anti-Semitism, and most recently Islamophobia present in the US. Further, younger generations exercise religion less, as spaces in the US become more secularized.

⁹⁶ Reverend George Docherty, “*Under God Sermon*” at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church (New York: Christian Heritage, 1954), 5.

⁹⁷ Katherine Meizel, “A Singing Citizenry: Popular Music and Civil Religion in America,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45 (2006): 499.

⁹⁸ Most recently, after the terrorist attack on 9/11, Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the U.S.A.” surged on radio charts for the first time since its release in 1983. Katherine Meizel, “A Singing Citizenry: Popular Music and Civil Religion in America,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45 (2006): 498.

⁹⁹ David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

2.3 MYTH I: CLINE AS COUNTRY'S CHERISHED "GIRL SINGER"

Patsy Cline began her career as a yodeling foot stomping honky tonk singer who loved her tasseled cowgirl outfits. Yet, as her career expanded toward the late 1950s, industry gatekeepers, such as producer Owen Bradley, retired her "honky tonk" style and promoted stylish 1950s clothing, and encouraged a more reserved musical cadence. Cline rarely spoke on camera, which in many ways disguised her country vernacular speaking style, and shrouded her noted "rough" demeanor. Rather, Cline performed as a pop singer who introduced something now referred to as the "Nashville Sound" – a refined music form with folk and country underpinnings, but with polished stringed accompaniment and prominent background vocals.¹⁰⁰

Throughout historical narratives and archival research, many industry insiders reference Cline's friendliness toward and solidarity with fellow women in the industry, but more contemporary thoughts on Cline point out that she was a "woman before her time." In her 1996 *NY Times Magazine* contribution to an edited volume entitled "Heroine Worship," singer Rosanne Cash noted that Cline often came over to her house to see Rosanne's parents – singers Johnny Cash and June Carter. When young Rosanne asked many questions about Cline's raucous behavior, her mother would reply with, "oh she is just ahead of her time."¹⁰¹ Cash later found

¹⁰⁰ Bufwack and Oermann, 207.

¹⁰¹ Rosanne Cash, "Patsy Cline, Honky Tonk Angel," *New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 24, 1996), 66-67.

that people in the industry used this phrasing as a euphemism for a rowdy female performer who refused to conform to the role of “girl singer,” the respectable prototype deemed valuable by male music producers and consumers. Additionally, many journalists use the idiom that Cline was “ahead of her time” to explain her unique musical style during her career and its influence after her death. It functions also as a coded euphemism that operates to imply her promiscuity and confrontational personality.

In the 1950s, a “girl singer” was traditionally young, single, white, and introduced on a show run by older white men. This figure, like Dolly Parton to Porter Wagner, was a complement and sidekick to an established musical insider. Male gatekeepers of the 1950s also promoted a brand of public morality and respectability for girl singers, which we now recognize as a double standard. Bailey argues that “reputation was key; respectability matters” particularly in post-WWII America.¹⁰² Bailey posits that this post-war context instructed men to want sex and women to want marriage; thus, “marriage became the price for sex.”¹⁰³ However, this commodity exchange worked only when all women played by the same rules. To extend the economic metaphor, sexually experienced women were cheap, “second-hand goods.”¹⁰⁴

Cline, growing up in Winchester wore short shorts, drank, and had a well-known long-term affair with her older, married manager Bill Peer. While Peer was not stigmatized as an adulterer (but his wife did divorce him), Cline would never be able to outrun her immoral promiscuous reputation. Her hometown crowd booed her performances up until she died in 1963.¹⁰⁵ In 1962, singer Jimmy Dean supposedly volunteered in an interview that he never slept

¹⁰² Beth Bailey, “Patsy Cline and the Problem of Respectability,” in Hofstra, 70.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Woodward, “Sub-deb: Bargain Buys,” *Ladies Home Journal* (May 1942), 8.

¹⁰⁵ Gomery, 111.

with Cline, but that he “might be one of the few” who had not.¹⁰⁶ More significantly, Cline grew up on the “wrong side of the tracks” and did not adhere to what bell hooks calls the bourgeois decorum expected of “good white girls.”¹⁰⁷

Rather, Cline never accessed “good girl” status that made respectability accessible due to her poor economic class and open sexuality. Despite returning to her hometown in a Cadillac denoting wealth and prominence, her town’s members repeatedly alienated her as “trash,” and barred her from the “bourgeois construct that provides white women with full access to the privileges of white womanhood.”¹⁰⁸ This privileged whiteness, informed by stable middle class status and repressed sexuality, was never accessible to Cline during her life. Bourgeois decorum requires women to censor opposition, so that dominant ideologies go unchallenged in an effort to protect and preserve the privileges afforded those who adhere to the “cult of true womanhood,” which protects and rewards docile white femininity. Dissenting voices, hooks asserts, are excluded and ostracized from the white community as traitors not playing by the rules.¹⁰⁹ Twenty-five years after her death, a Winchester, Virginia resident harangued, “[a]sk anyone in this town and they’ll tell you. Patsy Cline was nothin’ but a whore.”¹¹⁰ This sentiment sufficiently exposes that Cline dissented, challenged the dominant ideologies of bourgeois decorum that relies on class, racial, and gender division. In an effort to maintain respectability and protect the segregated whiteness of Winchester, residents have vigilantly ostracized Cline’s memory ever since.

¹⁰⁶ See Ellis Nassour, *Honky Tonk Angel: The Intimate Story of Patsy Cline* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 52-53.

¹⁰⁷ hooks, *Talking Back*; hooks, *Outlaw Culture*.

¹⁰⁸ Kate Davy, “Outing Whiteness: A Feminist/Lesbian Project,” *Theatre Journal* 47 (1995): 204.

¹⁰⁹ bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹¹⁰ Mike D’Orso, “Bittersweet Dreams,” *Virginian Pilot and Ledger-Star* (Jan. 3, 1988): 297.

Respectability politics, or the impulse to police those within one's group in hopes of accruing favor and privilege with a superior caste, was particularly salient in country music among white hillbillies, historically disenfranchised from white privileges. Similarly, the Civil Rights Movement utilized respectability as a rhetorical strategy in the selection of Rosa Parks as the catalyst and face of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.¹¹¹ Additionally, second wave feminists promoted young, traditionally beautiful Gloria Steinem as its figurehead – often regarded as a strategy to replace the older, less traditionally attractive Betty Friedan amidst growing television coverage. However, the rejection of respectability politics defines much of Cline's persona, yet her public memory negates this part of her. Cline, in life, was proud of her rough exterior and assumed that many people were “rougher” than they cared to admit.

Members of the Grand Ole Opry performed a 1961 concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Panned as a night of “hicks from the sticks,” many New Yorkers were shocked that the event sold out.¹¹² In response to the show, Cline boasted that the Grand Ole Opry performers “made ‘em show their true colors. They sittin’ up there stompin’ their feet and yellin’ just like a bunch of hillbillies, just like we do.”¹¹³ Cline shared this memory of Carnegie Hall with an Atlanta audience – and it reveals an expression of pleasure. She successfully destabilized bourgeois decorum and blurred class lines. Her producer, Owen Bradley, understood the significance of respectability and manicured Cline's public image to reflect 1950s respectability in line with Christianity-laced public morality.

¹¹¹ Beth Bailey, “Patsy Cline and the Problem of Respectability” in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. Warren Hofstra (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 71.

¹¹² This reflects a contemporary sentiment among the supposed pedantic “urban elites” who negate the significance of country music. It is also particularly relevant to the 2016 Presidential election, when liberals were told they were out of touch with rural Americans and their affinity for candidate, Donald Trump. Others argue, though, that Trump – as an urban elite that should have been feared by many of country music's fan base – actually exploited their need for jobs and their admiration for an accessible, bombastic television star.

¹¹³ Margaret Jones, *Patsy: The Life and Times of Patsy Cline* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 230-32.

In protest of the overly demure pop music industry, Cline once wore curlers in her hair to an important meeting and recording session to challenge the lines of gender and class respectability.¹¹⁴ Her public image as a star, however, was carefully constructed. In an era when actress Ingrid Bergman's career was jeopardized due to having a child out of wedlock, scholar Beth Bailey argues that Cline adhered to public markers of respectability – especially on-air.¹¹⁵ Never talking off script and letting her singing voice speak for her, Cline's popularity spread with generic 1950s songs written for her.

Her three albums that were marketed while she was alive, give no inclination that she sings country music or had a complicated reputation. Her 1957 debut album focuses on her face rather than body, pointing to her youthful happiness and desexualized image. On her 1961 album "Showcase," she looks away from the viewer, allowing audiences to gaze upon her and her now signature dark black hair and open body position in which she is able to take up space, but also clearly show her wedding ring as a marker of respectability. Fans and industry colleagues routinely referenced Cline's size: at an impressive 5'6" she often wore two piece costumes that could be altered regularly due to her fluctuating weight.¹¹⁶ Her imposing stature in many ways informed how colleagues remembered her. Music historian and fan Robert Oermann expressed concern that actress Jessica Lange, in her 1985 screen depiction of Cline in *Sweet Dreams*,

¹¹⁴ See Joli Jensen, "Patsy Cline Crossovers: Celebrity, Reputation, and Feminine Identity," in *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music*, eds. Kristine McCusker and Diane Pecknold. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 127-128.

¹¹⁵ Bailey, 80.

¹¹⁶ Mary Bufwack notes that Cline's wardrobe reflected her versatility from cocktail dresses to slacks to gingham sundresses to fur. Mary Bufwack, "Girls with Guitars," in *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 169. Also, she routinely changed her costumes to more "country" when she performed south of the Mason-Dixon line. "Becoming Patsy Cline," Exhibit. *Museum of the Shenandoah Valley* (Winchester: VA, July 6, 2014).

would not be able to “evoke Patsy Cline’s sheer size” as a “hard-living hillbilly heroine.”¹¹⁷ Yet Cline’s stature was tempered by her demure vocal control. She exercised forceful vocal range, but demonstrated her tender sensibilities by employing “teardrops” or signature breaks in her voice that she honed in her early years yodeling.

Another signature component of Cline’s style was the now iconic bright red color she is often shown wearing. On her 1961 album *Showcase*, Cline sits amidst a monochromatic red landscape, only broken up by her conservative white jacket, and a gold sparkly slipper. The outfit on the album cover connotes a contrastingly demure respectability and ostentatious style. However, many agree that nothing about the album cover alludes to country music. Her third album *Sentimentally Yours* similarly taps into the 1960s trope of an available “uptown” housewife and negotiates demure respectability and ostentatious style. Donning dark lace and an ambiguous “dreamy” facial expression, Cline again looks away from the camera slightly, to allow the viewer to look at her sprawled on a white pillow. Again, white accents break up the darker monochromatic backdrop. While not explicitly sexualized, this album is more suggestive since through a heterosexist frame the spectator occupies the male gaze – a widespread trend in media well-articulated by Laura Mulvey and Bonnie Dow. The ubiquitous practice of looking at women as sexual objects reinforces what Mulvey calls “patterns of fascination” that imply the viewer or audience is a heterosexual male; thus, the woman on display is rendered a silent object of desire.¹¹⁸ Yet the title highlights that Cline is only *sentimentally* yours, not literally accessible, arguably appealing to women too. The phrasing may allude to the innocuous tone of a letter salutation akin to “yours truly.” Additionally, this album also reveals another shift, Cline’s

¹¹⁷ Robert K. Oermann, *Tennessean* (Oct. 4, 1985). Nashville Public Library Archives, accessed June 5 2015.

¹¹⁸ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. S. Thornham (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press), 58–69.

change in hairdo to cover significant scars on her upper nose and forehead from a near fatal 1961 car crash.

Cline told many friends she would die young. She even told close friend Dottie West, that she “wouldn’t make it to thirty” years old.¹¹⁹ Magee, in her 2014 article on celebrity death points out that many feel closer to celebrities than to their own family and friends; therefore, when a familiar celebrity dies, TV becomes a “conduit” between the fan and celebrity in contemporary culture.¹²⁰ When Cline died in the 1963 crash of a private jet piloted by a novice in poor weather, newspapers were the medium that brought fans closer to her.¹²¹ Cline had two children ages 5 and 2 with second husband Charlie Dick, yet very little press ever mentioned her role as a mother. Journalists likely omitted this detail during her life in order to align more closely with the framing of “girl singer” status (e.g. young, naïve, available and unattached). Interestingly, many contemporary female celebrities, who are childless, have complained about journalists’ intrusive, sexist fixation on if and when they are having children.¹²² Celebrity Jennifer Aniston asserts that this fixation purports that “women are somehow incomplete, unsuccessful, or unhappy if they’re not married with children.”¹²³ Also, during Cline’s life pregnancy was often private, highlighting why perhaps Cline’s two pregnancies and children were never featured in

¹¹⁹ Eerily, Hank Williams titled his final hit song, “I’ll Never Get out of This World Alive,” which was #1 when he died in 1953 of a drug overdose.

¹²⁰ Sara Magee, “Rest in Mediated Peace: How Entertainment Tonight’s coverage of Natalie Wood’s and John Belushi’s Deaths Helped Shape Celebrity Death Coverage,” *Celebrity Studies* 5 (2014), 293.

¹²¹ Cline died the same year as President Kennedy’s assassination, ushering in a unique media spectacle that blurred public and private grief.

¹²² For a discussion on this fixation as “Bump Patrol” surveillance, see Susan Douglas, *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture Took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2010), 260-261.

¹²³ Meg Butler, “Nobody Asks a Guy That! Childless Celebrities Explain Why They’re Not Pressed to Have Kids.” *MadameNoire* (Jul. 22, 2015), accessed November 2 2016, <http://madamenoire.com/548508/childless-celebrities/> Jennifer Aniston, “For the Record,” *Huff Post Women* (July 12 2016), accessed November 2 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/for-the-record_us_57855586e4b03fc3ee4e626f

the many fan magazines or newspapers that I have reviewed. Further, pregnancy was historically taboo.

In the early years of television, TV executives prohibited characters from even using the term “pregnant” on-air.¹²⁴ CBS executives expressed concern over Lucille Ball’s 1953 episode of *I Love Lucy* entitled “Lucy is Enceinte [pregnant]” but found Ball’s searing popularity after giving birth reassuring.¹²⁵ Today, by contrast, pregnancy is often a public performance informed by body politics, judgment, consumer culture, and surveillance.¹²⁶ In fact, in contemporary media, outlets openly speculate about women’s procreative potential and their mothering competency once the baby arrives.¹²⁷ Yet, Cline’s maternal status did not seemingly become relevant to audiences, until after she died.

In press clippings after her death, journalists repeatedly cited that Cline did not stay overnight and avoid dangerous air travel because she “had to get home to her children.”¹²⁸ Magee argues that the celebrity death genre of coverage aims to release information about the person’s death to make audiences feel personally involved, which sustains a collective grief.¹²⁹ I argue that Cline’s tragic death and its rationale, as motivated by a mother’s commitment, reinforce her popularity as respectable and “universal” in her love for her children. Additionally,

¹²⁴ Ian Lendler, “A Timeline of TV Censorship,” *CNN* (August 1, 2007), accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2007/LIVING/wayoflife/07/31/censorship/>

¹²⁵ See Jude Davis and Carol R. Smith. “Race, Gender, and the American Mother: Political Speech and the Maternity Episodes of *I Love Lucy* and *Murphy Brown*,” *American Studies* 39 (1998): 33-63. Note that “pregnant” was omitted by using the French term, despite her husband/co-star’s native language being Spanish.

¹²⁶ Madeline Yonker, “The Rhetoric of Mommy Blogs: A Study of Mothering Made Public” (PhD Diss. Syracuse University, 2012). Emily Deering Crosby, “A Quiver Full of Mommy Blogs: Ideological Subversion and Reinforcement of Mothering Models Online.” (MA Thesis, Indiana University IUPUI, 2011).

¹²⁷ For example, recent news outlets speculate, announce, and monitor the births of celebrities’ offspring such as Duchess Kate Middleton, Chelsea Clinton, Janet Jackson, and routinely pester childless public figures. For example, during the 2016 Presidential election, candidate Carly Fiorina was questioned publicly about why she did not have children signaling a bizarre precedent that renders women’s private decisions public – a sentiment aligning with the rollbacks to women’s reproductive freedoms.

¹²⁸ “Nashville Banner Archives,” “Tennessean Archives” *Nashville Public Library*, accessed June 6 2015.

¹²⁹ Magee, 295.

this media framing of her death does not complicate her wholesome public image or destabilize her public memory. Therefore, Cline's legacy as a talented *country* singer and *respectable* mother was employed rhetorically during her resurgence in the 1980s.

Jensen contends that it was not until the 1980s that audiences were "ready" for Patsy Cline.¹³⁰ Cline's career was largely dormant except for a posthumous 1967 release of her greatest hits album and her 1973 induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame, as its first solo female inductee.¹³¹ Many argue that the musical landscape shifted after Cline's death in 1963 with the "British Invasion" of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, causing audiences to forget about the once popular Nashville Sound. However, with the release and unexpected critical success of *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), a "biopic" of singer Loretta Lynn's life, Patsy Cline was re-introduced to mainstream culture, portrayed in this film by actor Beverly D'Angelo. Cline's popular resurgence in the successful Lynn biopic spurred the 1985 Cline biopic called *Sweet Dreams*. Many critics dismissed the movie as inaccurate, tumultuous, and salacious. Cline biographer Ellis Nassour noted that *Sweet Dreams* is "a good movie if you know nothing about Patsy Cline."¹³² Many audience members were also critical of Cline's singing voice being dubbed over the actor playing Cline, Jessica Lange. The film did not do well at the box office or critically, perhaps too, because it challenged the once wholesome uncomplicated narrative of Patsy Cline. More broadly, *Sweet Dreams* also destabilized the growing nostalgia for the seemingly stable 1950s that were remembered with an "idyllic, sentimental, and dreamy aura," in contrast to

¹³⁰ Jensen, "Posthumous Patsy Clines," 125.

¹³¹ Over the next two decades, only four more women were inducted: performers Minnie Pearl (1975), Kitty Wells (1976), Loretta Lynn (1988), and music executive Frances Preston (1992). Meanwhile 31 male performers, industry insiders, or men's groups were inducted between 1973 and 1993.

¹³² Jim White, "Is Charlie Making Patsies of Lesbians?" *The Independent* (Apr. 16, 1993), 18.

social upheavals of the 1960s.¹³³ Regardless of the criticism, the film certainly made Patsy Cline even more recognizable to disparate audiences. Additionally, starting in the early 1980s, Canadian singer k.d. lang playfully claimed that she was Patsy Cline “reincarnated” and brought Cline’s music back to prominence.¹³⁴ This “re-circulation” of Cline’s image, music, and personal narrative is deeply rhetorical, especially when looking at who did or did not circulate the images.¹³⁵ Two distinct groups that did re-circulate Cline, were feminist fans and Republicans. Commonly thought to be adversaries, these groups both rediscovered Patsy Cline and the genre of country music and used them in equally rhetorical, yet divergent ways.

2.4 MYTH II: CLINE AS PATRIOT / FEMINIST

Ronald Reagan, president of the United States from 1981-1989 fomented a resurgence in conservatism and in doing so “adopted country music as the sound of traditional patriotism.”¹³⁶ Reagan’s cowboy aesthetic as a tenet of American white masculinity reframed “anti-intellectual” “anti-hippie” country music to a contemporary audience and redefined it as politically charged. Reagan’s masculine aesthetic complements Jeffords’s exploration of the “hard body”

¹³³ Hofstra, 1. These social upheavals included the Vietnam War, countercultural movements, Women’s Liberation, and the Civil Rights Movement.

¹³⁴ Joli Jensen, “Posthumous Patsy Clines: Constructions of Identity in Hillbilly Heaven” in *After Life as Afterimage: Understanding Posthumous Fame*, eds. Steve Jones and Joli Jensen (New York: Peter Lang), 162.

¹³⁵ Cara Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 223.

¹³⁶ Hofstra, 13.

masculinities of the 1980s that were predicated on muscular physiques, individualism, and violence epitomized by Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, for example.¹³⁷ However, country music was still “full of heart,” and for the “family man,” which aligned with Reagan, and the “compassionate conservative” movement made popular by conservative politicians such as George W. Bush.¹³⁸

Additionally, those outside the Republican Party could strategically employ the newly politically charged country music to stir up connotations of conservatism, nostalgia, and Americana. For example, Texas businessman and Independent candidate Ross Perot used Cline’s music in his 1992 Presidential campaign and is often blamed for taking votes away from Republican nominee George H.W. Bush. In effect, Democrat Bill Clinton won the Presidency, revealing the potential influence of Cline’s music in splitting conservative voters, while the liberal nominee was unscathed despite Perot’s more moderate political leanings.¹³⁹

In response to this “rebranding” of country music as conservative, the political left resisted the genre and the relationship between country music and left wing politics became hostile. For example, more recently in 2003, the Dixie Chicks, a widely popular country crossover group, criticized President George W. Bush. Swiftly, many radio stations banned their songs from airing. I argue that owners and gatekeepers at country music radio stations, who are almost exclusively white men, saw this fissure as an opportunity to exercise territoriality and punish “good white girls” for transgressing the civil religion of the genre. In other words, country music had promoted the dominant ideology of political conservatism and a distinct brand

¹³⁷ Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 21.

¹³⁸ Brenton Malin, *American Masculinity under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties “Crisis of Masculinity”* (New York: Peter Lang), 29.

¹³⁹ Teresa Goddu, “Bloody Daggers and Lonesome Graveyards,” in *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 47.

of patriotism, which should not be challenged – especially by young white women. Therefore, the Dixie Chicks, like Cline, were ostracized to protect the dominant ideologies associated with country music of the United States after 9/11.

The Dixie Chicks’ controversy becomes more salient through the lens of Cline’s legacy. Conservative leaders, by coopting Cline as an “authentic” *country* music star, provided conservative voters and country music fans the opportunity to frame her music as patriotic Americana. More specifically, Cline could be fashioned in line with conservative ideals of white femininity and bourgeois decorum – passivity, sexual purity, and adherence to dominant ideologies such as patriarchal leadership informed by Christianity. In effect, Republicans employed Cline as an effective rhetorical strategy, which promotes certain token women as means to negate the troublesome antifeminist discourse that plagues many conservative movements. Thus, national narratives of conservatism and patriotism routinely rely on whiteness, and traditional gender roles.

Prividera and Howard’s analysis of the “warrior hero” in contemporary news media illuminates how white femininity functions hegemonically. Positioned as superior to other femininities, it helps to bolster white masculinity and patriarchal militarism.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, women of color and feminists are not considered part of the “national family.”¹⁴¹ Therefore, it is strategic to use Patsy Cline as an icon of “good girl” white femininity because her career’s

¹⁴⁰ Laura Prividera and John Howard III, “Masculinity, Whiteness, and the Warrior Hero: Perpetuating the Strategic Rhetoric of U.S. Nationalism and the Marginalization of Women,” *Women and Language* 29 (2006): 32. Of particular relevance, is Prividera and Howard’s exploration of Jessica Lynch and her framing as a fragile, childlike servicewoman in need of saving. Meanwhile the two women of color who were captured with Lynch, were featured less prominently in news coverage of their recovery and survival; they were “othered.” Additionally, I think specifically of the popular “human interest” stories that feature white military wives as devoted helpmeets and mothers that inform stories of war, sacrifice, reverence, but also Christianity, class, sexuality, and “good white girls” who must not question dominant ideologies, but rather publically rationalize them.

¹⁴¹ Raka Shome, “Whiteness and the Politics of Location: Postcolonial Reflections” in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*, eds. Thomas Nakayama and Judith Martin, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), 107-128.

dormancy allowed her to be what Jensen calls “decontextualized;” she is but another “posthumous Patsy Cline” who I argue can be whatever one needs her to be. Interestingly, her own family and close friends were complicit in her decontextualization.

Rosanne Cash wrote that those few people who actually *knew* Patsy Cline are “somewhat revisionist in their collective retelling.” She claims that because Cline was “so damned great...they felt a need to polish and repair her wild and willful personality in order to complement the magnitude of her talent, particularly since she was a woman in an era that did not suffer female accountability gladly.”¹⁴² Therefore, her “wild and willful personality” did not cleanly coincide with gender and class ideals, so in a maneuver to protect Cline’s talent and legacy, her close friends and family revised her image after her death. Yet, later during Cline’s reemergence in the 1980s, there was a deeper appreciation for women in music with “wild and willful personalities” who were often reclaimed as feminist trailblazers.

Due to the well-documented feminist backlash in the 1980s, Kristine McCusker asserts that feminists were looking to reclaim iconic women as historical feminists.¹⁴³ She argues that of all the “posthumous” Patsy Clines that range from conservative patriot to abused wife, scholars prefer the “feminist” Patsy – despite the evidence to the contrary. Kimble and Olson refer to this inconsistency in their exploration of Rosie the Riveter as “an anachronistic recognition of feminist empowerment.”¹⁴⁴ Cline’s fellow performer George Hamilton IV suggests the familiar claim that Cline was “a woman ahead of her time” and a “pre-feminist” because the music

¹⁴² Roseanne Cash, “Patsy Cline, Honky Tonk Angel.” *New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 24, 1996), 66-67.

¹⁴³ Kristine McCusker, “Cultural Scripts and Patsy Cline’s Career in the 1950s,” in Hofstra 99. For a specific account of sexist backlash in the Reagan administration, see Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991), 269-292.

¹⁴⁴ James J. Kimble and Lester C. Olson, “Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconceptions in J. Howard Miller’s ‘We Can Do It!’ Poster,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9 (2006): 550.

industry was a man's world. He asserts that Cline did not "open the doors" for women in country music; she "kicked them down."¹⁴⁵

However, many biographers, by ignoring primary source materials from the 1950s, misinterpret Cline's drive to sing, succeed, and escape poverty as a feminist mission. Many argue that the inclination to see women's acts as motivated by feminism elides many of the intersectional complexities women face, such as class. For example, Kimble and Olson challenge the essentializing narrative that all US women went to work during WWII solely to participate in patriotic war efforts. Many women needed the income.¹⁴⁶ McCusker argues that in the 1980s, when Cline was "recontextualized," the public memory of Patsy Cline "became a political opportunity to reclaim feminism's gains – and reputation – while at the same time, rooting feminism in the 1950s, a time of supposed tranquility, calm, and domestic bliss."¹⁴⁷ This feminist strategy complicated "the New Right" narratives that conflated country music with traditional apolitical femininity. However, both conservative and feminist approaches to Cline's memory were oversimplified.

While Cline was often the first woman to close a show, was the first woman to perform at Carnegie Hall, and helped other women navigate the sexist music industry with her honed "street smarts," she never expressed sentiment that could be read as feminist.¹⁴⁸ When describing her 1961 near fatal car accident to her audience at the Cimmaron Theatre, she stated: "oh me. I tell ya those women drivers are rough on us good folks." By calling out the guilty driver's gender and equating women with bad driving, Cline sufficiently distances herself from other women.

¹⁴⁵ George Hamilton IV, "The Early Years: Hard Times and Good Times for Country Music in 1950s Washington, D.C." in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. Warren Hofstra (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2013), 107.

¹⁴⁶ Kimble and Olson, 561.

¹⁴⁷ Kristine McCusker, "Cultural Scripts and Patsy Cline's Career in the 1950s," in Hofstra 99.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Bufwack and Robert Oermann. *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music 1800-2000*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), 225.

She is not like inferior women who lose control of their vehicles; she is one of the “good folks.” Her phrasing exposes how internalized misogyny can inform horizontal hostility or the intragroup tensions that thwart alliances and solidarity among the oppressed. This comment, while ephemeral and unprovocative, may expose deeper motivations. Perhaps, Cline wanted to be “one of the boys” and appeal to her audience’s largely male demographic, in hopes of accruing privileges in what Simone de Beauvoir calls “alliance with the superior caste.”¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Cline’s decontextualization allows for several different readings of her legacy, but assuming her motivations were feminist is oversimplified – especially since McCusker maintains that the country music industry deeply exploited unrepresented male singers as well.¹⁵⁰ However, the disparate readings of Cline dissipated upon the 1988 re-release of her *Greatest Hits* album, which certainly promoted Cline as an emblem of country music nostalgia.

In 1988, Cline’s contested legacy was made simpler because of the *recontextualized* Cline depicted on her *Greatest Hits* album cover. Framed as a country star and patriotic symbol of a simpler romanticized era, Cline 1988 album offers a rich rhetorical frame. Cline is looking up at the camera, smiling brightly. Her songs are not listed on the album cover in the assumption that by now, everyone interested likely knows her songs. Rather than a feminine and reserved dress in a nondescript color, she is wearing an elaborate country and western shirt, with bright yellow fringe, flowery applique and her *now* signature neck scarf. Her hair is full and from her ears dangle horseshoe earrings. The background is black, making her rosy face and fringe stand out to the spectator. Additionally, the colors are moss green and salmon, which convey a warmth and allude to the muted pastel colors made famous by 1950s gowns. Further, the most prominent font used is akin to what one might see on a diner sign or a Fender guitar. The cursive of her name

¹⁴⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Gallimard, Paris: 1949), 10.

¹⁵⁰ Kristine McCusker, “Cultural Scripts and Patsy Cline’s Career in the 1950s,” in Hofstra 100.

also mimics an autograph – with the “i” in “Cline” punctuated with a star, as if it were her signature at the conclusion of an intimate letter. Additionally, the star connotes her celebrity “star” status. Moreover, the font is communicating specifically to a 1980s audience that would recognize generational cues of the 1950s and early 60s. Perhaps not surprisingly, this *Greatest Hits* album did just as well as Cline’s original greatest hits; however, this was a different Cline – a *country* Cline.

This country Cline was also different from her previous greatest hits album because her 1988 image is not a photograph or a painting; it is something in between. Cline’s image almost looks like an old black and white photograph negative that was hand painted – like early film. Her lips are extra red; her cheeks are extra rosy. She has become a caricatured, campy icon of “country and western” clearly rooted in the past, which is conveyed through the glossy, dreamy style of the image. Jameson argues that nostalgia is constructed through stylistic connotation rather than historical content – the “glossy” nature of images gives a sense of “pastness.”¹⁵¹ This rhetorical framing signals to audiences what they should commemorate and remember from a bygone era. By re-releasing a greatest hits album twenty-five years after a singer’s death, the rhetorics that constitute public memory “manifest assumptions about what is worth remembering about the past.”¹⁵² Additionally, a greatest hits album implies the singer was successful with multiple hit songs and thus, audiences should remember them. According to Brown, Americans express concern about how best to teach young Americans “not to forget something they had neither known nor remembered in the first place.”¹⁵³ Therefore, commemorative practices that

¹⁵¹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 19.

¹⁵² Prelli, 11.

¹⁵³ Stephen H. Browne, “Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Commemoration,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 (1999): 176.

promote certain narratives become significant teaching tools. Even if audiences did not know of Cline, the commemorative image on the 1988 album teaches audiences of her greatness and “pastness” through a hyperbolic construction of patriotic nostalgia. This rhetorical framing champions her significance as a figure worthy of public memory, and helps to promote her widely relatable music that transcends genre and generation.

Unlike other singers of her time, Cline’s pop lyrics were universal and even vague, far from honkytonk themes such as divorce, violence, and rural poverty. In contrast to other country singers of the late 1950s and 1960s, like Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette, Cline’s songs almost seem generic. The difference was that Lynn wrote her own songs, about her own kids, her own drunken husband, and her own honkytonk life. Wynette discussed her own divorces, her own stigma as a single mother, and her own sense of disappointment. Cline, on the other hand, did not write her own songs or read music, but sang songs written by men for her about topics like heartbreak, loneliness, and general melancholy. While he did not know Cline personally, songwriter Donn Hecht recalls that Cline “considered everything she recorded like an entry in her diary,” even though she did not like or connect to all the songs she sang.¹⁵⁴ Cline’s personal approach to generic songs allow audiences to feel her emotion, but still pull out their own polysemic meanings. Many argue that the 1950s were an era of universality. Uniform houses lined suburban streets; car manufacturers lauded assembly lines for their uniformity in product; and Cline’s songs consistently conveyed a universal narrative of heartache. Post-WWII consumerism often promoted products designed to satiate any feelings of emptiness. For example, uniform consumer goods were catered to everyone, and thus, no one in particular. One could argue that much of pop music, in many ways, reflected this uniformity as well.

¹⁵⁴ Donn Hecht, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Permanent Exhibit (Nashville, TN, June 7, 2015). Hecht wrote “Walking after Midnight,” made famous by Cline.

Cline's music, as a product of the 1950s, is catered to everyone and no one, allowing for polysemy, which gave her the opportunity to be loved by audiences like queer communities, outside the limits of a music genre and generation. I argue that the majority of her songs offer little information besides occasional pronouns, and through a queer reading, could challenge heterosexist assumptions about love and desire. For example, "Three Cigarettes in the Ashtray" (1957), "Walking after Midnight" (1957), "She's Got You" (1962), "Crazy," (1961), and "Leaving on Your Mind" (1963) never imply that her love is a man and one could interpret her longings as lust for another woman or a queer genderless narrative around "you" and "me." Robert Oermann in a 1985 article for the newspaper *Tennessean* wrote, "[e]very love story, everywhere, should be accompanied by music of Patsy Cline."¹⁵⁵ Oermann intentionally or not, releases Cline from heteronormativity, genre, and geographical region in this seemingly innocuous statement. But upon further inspection, his framing highlights, again, why her malleability as a posthumous eye-con is rhetorically significant.

In 1993, journalist Jim White recognized Cline's popularity among lesbian communities in the United Kingdom. He notes that Cline's music "has a sense of unrequited passion...which is meaningful to those who are unable, because of outside pressures, to express feelings openly."¹⁵⁶ Additionally, Cline's husband was notoriously disliked because of his abusive relationship with Cline. However, Cline is understood as an inspirational woman because "she wore trousers onstage" yet "glamorised the struggle" as "the nearest thing to a diva country music has."¹⁵⁷ Cline's costuming, talent, and her success amidst "the struggle" demonstrates how

¹⁵⁵ Robert K. Oermann, *The Tennessean*, Nashville Public Library Archives (Oct. 4, 1985).

¹⁵⁶ Jim White, "Is Charlie Making Patsies of Lesbians?" *The Independent* (Apr. 16, 1993), 18, accessed Aug 19, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/is-charlie-making-patsies-of-lesbians-a-gay-craze-for-patsy-cline-has-brought-riches-to-her-widower-1455520.html>

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

her coinciding glamour and grit are appealing. As the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum puts it, “Patsy Cline’s voice was a sophisticated instrument that conveyed down-home grit and uptown glamour with equal ease.”¹⁵⁸ Cline’s duality as down-home and uptown explain why she is a rhetorical eye-con, as a recontextualized figure who is rooted nowhere in particular. Thus, her appeal transcends the traditionally unqueer, white, rural communities of American country music.

Lecklider argues that popular music of the twentieth century, more than any other medium, has “provided an arena where marginalized voices can be heard and sexual identities shaped, challenged, and renegotiated.”¹⁵⁹ Taylor points out that music and queerness have parallels – helping to fashion “queer identities, the theatre of queer memory and the maintenance of queer culture more broadly. Moreover, music is a queer tactic of survival.”¹⁶⁰ Taylor asserts that queers “remade the world” in a few key musical performances. One, she notes, is k.d. lang’s queer presence within the genre of country music. While Taylor does not share this explicitly, lang’s career in country music actually began when she covered Patsy Cline’s songs. During her “torch and twang” performances, lang routinely mentioned that she was Patsy Cline reincarnated.¹⁶¹ This is particularly noteworthy since lang is a masculine-presenting, gender nonconforming lesbian – revealing that Cline was accessible enough that any fan could *become* her.¹⁶² In 1983, lang even named her band “The Reclines” as a tribute to and reemergence of the Cline’s posthumous legacy. This example exposes how musicians have queered, or destabilized,

¹⁵⁸ Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Permanent Inductee Exhibit (Nashville, TN, June 7, 2015).

¹⁵⁹ Aaron Lecklider, “Introduction,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 18:2 (2006), 117.

¹⁶⁰ Jodie Taylor, *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-Making*. (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2012), 49.

¹⁶¹ Mary A. Bufwack, “Girls with Guitars,” in *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 177-8.

¹⁶² Jensen, “Patsy Cline Crossovers,” 114.

“normative” country music that is understood to be conservative and banal.¹⁶³ Additionally, queer communities have embraced camp icons in country music such as Dolly Parton in celebration of their transgressive gender performance and hyperbolic stage presence. Furthermore, Patsy Cline’s music, voice, performance, costuming, and legacy speak to many audiences that transcend genre, region, gender, and sexuality. In effect, lang’s (re)imagining of Cline’s oeuvre allows for a self-fashioning of queer expression away from heterocentric music cultures, again highlighting the perceivable “universal” appeal of Cline’s music.¹⁶⁴

I argue in the section that follows, that Cline’s seemingly “universal” appeal is the main reason why she was selected to be featured on a state-sanctioned, government-funded rhetorical piece of Americana: a 1993 US postage stamp. More specifically, this rhetorical move commemorated this newfound *country* Cline as a “universal” American eye-con, refashioned to fit narratives of feminism, civil religion, and most prominently *white* Americana as a dominant visual ideology of citizenship.

¹⁶³ It is necessary to point out, however, that the country music industry is still charged as a sexist and homophobic industry.

¹⁶⁴ Taylor, 50.

2.5 MYTH III: CLINE AS UNIVERSAL ICON

1993 ushered in a particularly significant era in country music. Garth Brooks came to prominence as a top selling country *and* pop artist. Labeled the “anti-Hank,” Brooks’s popularity illuminates ongoing tensions in country music over questions of authenticity. Goodman writes that country music audiences initially rejected Brooks for purportedly displacing all sense of tradition in country music.¹⁶⁵ For example, Brooks’s use of an electric guitar, his lack of vocal twang, his employment of flashy concert antics in front of huge sold-out arenas, and his donning of tight jeans, provided mass crossover appeal but an unrecognizable performance to country traditionalists.¹⁶⁶ Ironically, decades later in 2009, journalist Steve Tuttle labeled Brooks the “modern day Hank Williams,” which illuminates the shifting meaning of “authenticity” in country music and shifting audience sensibilities.¹⁶⁷

Garth Brooks’s relationship to country music has shifted over time; but he has undoubtedly been a consistent hit maker and star. While he may seem like only a minor player in the vastness of contemporary music history, he is 4th in all time music sales, behind Elvis

¹⁶⁵ David Goodman, *Modern Twang: An Alternative Country Music Guide and Directory* (Nashville, TN: Downing Press, 1999), vii.

¹⁶⁶ Garth Brooks’s antics include swinging over audiences on suspended wires and smashing guitars on stage.

¹⁶⁷ Steve Tuttle, “Is This the End of Traditional Country Music?” *Newsweek* (Apr. 2, 2009), 1. Accessed January 6 2017 from <http://www.newsweek.com/end-traditional-country-music-77489>

Presley, Michael Jackson, and Elton John.¹⁶⁸ Brooks's popularity demonstrates the often under recognized impact of country music as the most popular and lucrative music genre in the United States.¹⁶⁹ For example, 2016 Nielsen data recognized 1,882 country music radio stations, dwarfing the 464 pop contemporary music radio stations in the United States.¹⁷⁰ Many trace the boom of contemporary country music back to early 1990s crossover stars like Garth Brooks and Shania Twain. In 1995, Shania Twain became a country pop sensation with her album *The Woman in Me*, and solidified country's new prominence as a financial and cultural force.¹⁷¹ In addition, Twain's music and style hinted at larger 1990's "girl power" trends that often offered female empowerment in the form of flirty feminine performances and heightened consumerism.¹⁷² Twain's 1997 "Come on Over" album is the all-time best selling studio album of all time.¹⁷³ Thus, Cline being portrayed as *country* Cline is significant to the era, as country music made a resurgence as not only political and "girl friendly," but an emotionally nostalgic nod to America's "yesterday." Cline's stamp reflects this.

¹⁶⁸ As the two surviving legends, Brooks and John still produce music signaling that they may ascend the list. Brooks releases music regularly. He released album *Gunslinger* in 2016, which is his first album to be available at stores other than Walmart and available via exclusive Amazon music streaming services. Brooks notoriously resisted allowing his music to be streamed, making purchasing CDs (exclusively at Walmart) the only way fans could access his music. This proved savvy, since Brooks made significant profits from his Walmart contracts – as music stores struggle to stay in business.

¹⁶⁹ Don Cusic, "Country Green: The Money in Country Music" in *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, ed., Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 200-208.

¹⁷⁰ "2016 Nielsen Audio Data: Number of Stations by Format," accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.newsgeneration.com/broadcast-resources/number-of-stations-by-format/>,

¹⁷¹ Twain's album featured #1 country hit "Any Man of Mine," which cracked the top 40 pop charts and was nominated for a Grammy. However, many women in country music site Twain's success as unique (due to her husband's role as a rock music insider). Women in country argue not much has changed because of sexist radio stations purposely limiting the number of women's songs they will play because they assume women listening only want to hear men. Thus, there is rarely room for more than one or two female country music stars. See Beverly Keel, "Sexist 'Tomato' Barb Launches Food Fight on Music Row," *The Tennessean* (May 27, 2015). <http://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/2015/05/27/sexist-tomato-barb-launches-food-fight-music-row/28036657/>

¹⁷² Susan Douglas, *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture Took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild*, (New York: St. Martin's, 2010).

¹⁷³ Twain's album is the 8th top selling album of all time; however, the seven albums that outsold it (e.g. The Eagles *Greatest Hits*, Garth Brooks *Double Live*) are greatest hits albums, live concert recordings, or compilations of previous material. Twain's album was a studio recording of entirely new songs.

Cline's 29-cent stamp is a "headshot" of Cline, and it connotes themes of nostalgia, country, and patriotism. Her head is cocked to her right and she is brightly smiling at the camera, even though she was most famous for singing about heartache. She is wearing a bright red country and western style shirt, a horseshoe earring, and white scarf around her neck that she rarely ever wore when she performed when she was alive. Her raven black hair is bigger than usual; her cheeks are rosy and lips are red. The background is sky blue, reinforcing the patriotic color scheme of red, white and blue – only broken up by her dark hair. She is positioned next to an "old fashioned" microphone to situate her in an historical context of the 1950s in case audiences were unfamiliar with her. On the lower left side, the stamp includes her name in bold text: PATSY CLINE; and along the left edge is her "description": COUNTRY & WESTERN SINGER, 1932-1963. The information promoted from this piece of visual rhetoric does not attempt to address her role as a pop "crossover" star, her tragic end, her upbringing as rural and low class, or her transgressions as a white, gendered music star. Rather, Cline is an icon of polished, patriotic, feminine nostalgia, even though primary sources do not support this.¹⁷⁴

Prelli states that based on our "mother language," certain texts, codes or images "call" the audience. Thus one could argue, as Haskins does, that stamps have become a significant mode of rhetorical production that "call" audiences to recognize those featured on stamps as worthy of our attention.¹⁷⁵ While commemorative stamps, like nondigital music, are becoming obsolete, the US postage stamp "commands and sustains attention relative to a vast field of competitors." Stamps' long history exposes a "value and attitude to those who somehow become audience" –

¹⁷⁴ Joli Jensen, "Posthumous Patsy Clines: Constructions of Identity in Hillbilly Heaven" in *After Life as Afterimage: Understanding Posthumous Fame*, eds. Steve Jones and Joli Jensen, (New York: Peter Lang), 121-141.

¹⁷⁵ Prelli, 9.

reinscribing that postage stamps are a worthwhile rhetorical artifact.¹⁷⁶ In fact, stamps, like state-sanctioned coins, are readily collected. Thus, the significance of something ostensibly innocuous and “everyday” like a stamp is actually more complicated than one might recognize. For example, audiences and citizens contested politician, and gay rights activist Harvey Milk’s image on a 2014 postage stamp, highlighting that stamp subjects are still seen by most, contested by many, and “call” various audiences to engage with them as emblems of American highlights.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, stamps act as rhetorical vessels of public memory depicting points of national pride and eliding points of shame, which audiences may dismiss as incongruent with romanticized US narratives.¹⁷⁸ As McKerrow asserts, “rhetoric conceals as much as it reveals.”¹⁷⁹

Gronbeck argues that visual rhetoric promotes ways of seeing that create “valuation” of certain things, and I argue that in a public visual culture that is deeply ageist, the “timeless” icon becomes significant to visual rhetoric scholarship. For example, US audiences did not see Marilyn Monroe and James Dean slowly age, gain weight, bald, and remember what they used to look like; “we” did not have to mourn their former selves as they slipped into physical or mental decline, drug abuse, or obscurity. “We” as audiences did not have to cringe in their efforts to revive a failing career as iconic figures like Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor or Whitney Houston had. Instead, by dying at a young age, they are no longer *the person* but a subject position to be manipulated, (mis)quoted, and reimagined for the present context. James Dean has been appropriated as an icon for “rebels.” Patsy Cline is a nostalgic nod to yesterday’s

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Similarly, many have called for Andrew Jackson to be replaced on the US \$20 bill by a woman of historical significance. Voters selected abolitionist Harriet Tubman as his replacement, but many express concern and disgrace about the hypocrisy of putting a disenfranchised poor Black woman on a state-sanctioned instrument of oppression that represents the problematic relationship between capitalism and slavery.

¹⁷⁸ Ekaterina Haskins, “Put Your Stamp on History: The USPS Commemorative Program *Celebrate the Century* and Postmodern Collective Memory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89 (2003), 1-18.

¹⁷⁹ Raymie McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 92.

“authentic” Americana. Marilyn Monroe is the great American Beauty. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is the sanitized figurehead of nonviolent resistance. Moreover, the “timeless” eye-con evades ageism and is significant for discussions of visual rhetoric, exposing how feminist criticism on ageism can inform visual rhetoric scholarship specifically in regards to women’s (in)visibility.

In her exploration of “rejuvenation” in postfeminist popular culture, Wearing illuminates how the aging female body is pathologized and disavowed. This process, she asserts, renders older women “dated irrelevances to younger women’s lives.”¹⁸⁰ As De Beauvoir states, “in the old person that we must become, we refuse to recognize ourselves.”¹⁸¹ Women, therefore, resist “becoming the other” as dated, irrelevant, and likely economically poor. Thus, women miss the opportunity to nurture intergenerational alliances – especially white women.

Kaplan explains that only to white women, in the Western culture specifically, is aging understood as trauma.¹⁸² Wearing asserts that white, heterosexual women most often see age “primarily in terms of decline and disintegration rather than accumulation and growth.”¹⁸³ Further, women often see youth as an asset they *lost*, revealing youth as a rhetorically advantage within white supremacist patriarchy. Rather, dominant cultural narratives could reimagine the passage of time as achievement or gain to empower older women, but that may deescalate consumer culture that promises to fix aging bodies that must be controlled.

To ensure women abide by dominant narratives of aging that spur anxieties and consumerism, disciplinary mechanisms pervade social decorum and women become complicit in policing other bodies. For example, women are expected to “act their age,” “dress their age,”

¹⁸⁰ Sadie Wearing, “Subjects of Rejuvenation,” in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds., Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 278.

¹⁸¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Old Age*, trans., Patrick O’Brian (New York: Norton & Company), 3.

¹⁸² E. Ann Kaplan, “Trauma and Aging” in *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

¹⁸³ Wearing, “Subjects of Rejuvenation,” 280.

look good “for their age” and warily reveal their age. While some research highlights the benefits of aging (when women express relief to no longer be sexualized or infantilized), the majority of ageism research chronicles aging’s consequences.¹⁸⁴ Copper laments that older women are often thought to be pitted against younger women to “compete for the crumbs of social power.”¹⁸⁵ This horizontal hostility is exacerbated by older women’s depiction in media in which they are villainous bosses, asexual mummies, mocked via “mother-in-law jokes,” and subjected to what Copper calls “mule work” in the form of unpaid domestic labor. As specific to this project, media often inform white girls, in particular, to grow up quickly since sexy women are speciously “powerful,” but quickly remind them that aging is to be feared and prevented by buying products to delay it. This liminal state of being old enough/too old creates a distinct double bind for white women in our visual culture, when you are damned if you do and damned if you do not.

Jamieson explores five significant double binds that women routinely face in contemporary American culture. She defines a double bind as two “false choices” that women must choose between. However, both options elicit punishment. One of the five binds that she explores is the aging/invisibility bind. Jamieson explains that aging women may stay visible in the public sphere amidst disciplining for being or looking “too old;” or, women may become invisible by escaping to the private sphere. Jamieson provides an example of a form of disciplining when she recounts her interviews with flight attendants who were referred to by male passengers as “granny” when they were in their 30s, exposing an obvious double standard

¹⁸⁴ For a look at the emancipatory potential of aging in androcentric work places, see Ulpukka Isopahkala-Bouret, “It’s a Great Benefit to Have Gray Hair!’: The Intersection of Gender, Aging, and Visibility in Midlife Professional Women’s Narratives,” *Journal of Women & Aging* 20 (2016), 1-11.

¹⁸⁵ Baba Copper, *Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism between Women* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1988).

that rarely ever applies to men who work.¹⁸⁶ This example exposes the “valuation” ascribed to “ways of seeing,” which reinforce and normalize the heterosexual male gaze that often expects to see (hetero)sexualized *young* women – especially in service jobs and in media for men’s viewing pleasure. Thus, the alternative to derision is to leave that job as flight attendant and be rendered “invisible,” but safe from ridicule.

While ageism impacts both women and men, they are impacted differently. For example, the elderly are more likely to live in poverty than those who are younger; however, poverty disproportionately impacts elderly women since they statistically live longer than men. However, older (50-65 years old) women and elderly women (65+ years old) are disproportionately less visible in media in comparison to men.¹⁸⁷ Outside of a few anomalies, older women are virtually invisible as positive public figures.¹⁸⁸ This observation becomes particularly salient when watching network and cable news as on-air female correspondents and journalists seem to be younger, or at least look younger, while male journalists are given freedom to openly age over expansive careers.¹⁸⁹ In fact, Jamieson argues that this trend is at its worst in film. She notes that in 1988 Sally Field played Tom Hanks’s love interest in the film *Punchline*, and in 1994’s *Forrest Gump* she played his mother.¹⁹⁰ Further, as Hollywood’s leading men age, their love

¹⁸⁶ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 151.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁸⁸ Some anomalies include Maggie Smith on “Downton Abbey,” Angela Lansbury on “Murder She Wrote,” Betty White on “Hot in Cleveland,” Kathy Bates, Angela Bassett, and Jessica Lange on “American Horror Story,” Cicely Tyson on “How to Get Away with Murder,” or films featuring Meryl Streep, Viola Davis, Cate Blanchett, Julianne Moore, or Helen Mirren, for example.

¹⁸⁹ Some anomalies in news journalism include (now retired) Barbara Walters, Gayle King, Maria Shriver, and Leslie Stahl.

¹⁹⁰ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 154.

interests on film stay the same age (ages 22-34),¹⁹¹ purporting a skewed sense of women's visibility, "normative" age-ranges in romantic relationships, and valuation that inform our "culturally based ways of seeing."¹⁹² In fact, Anne Bancroft was only 37 years old when she played the iconic aging seductress role in *Mrs. Robinson* (1967); meanwhile, Dustin Hoffman who played her young novice lover was 30 years old.¹⁹³ In effect, "women go from Lolitas to Yentas so fast it seems like they're living in dog years."¹⁹⁴

I include this literature on age and visibility because feminist critical scholarship on ageism can help inform how visual rhetoric scholarship addresses *invisibilities*. More specifically, Patsy Cline, having tragically died at age 30, did not have to negotiate the double bind of sexist ageism that renders aging women invisible. Instead, she stays young forever becoming a commodified subject position that we can manipulate for our present needs. Rather than having Dolly Parton as a "legend" on the postage stamp, the USPS chose a timeless icon who has the potential to be malleably shaped into ideals that convey "pastness." (Parton, by turning *herself* into a campy caricature has traversed the ageist double bind in her own way.) However, this dissertation chapter opens up a space to ask questions regarding how visual rhetoric scholarship accounts for the invisibility of older women and how gendered and racialized ageism informs our valuation and viewing practices. The public memory of Cline is

¹⁹¹ For visual charting of this ageist phenomenon, see Kyle Buchanan, "Leading Men Age, But Their Love Interests Don't" *Vulture* (Apr. 18, 2013). Accessed November 12 2016 <http://www.vulture.com/2013/04/leading-men-age-but-their-love-interests-dont.html>

¹⁹² Lester C. Olson, "Intellectual and Conceptual Resources for Visual Rhetoric: A Re-Examination of Scholarship since 1950" *Review of Communication* 7 (2007): 1-20.

¹⁹³ The character who played Mrs. Robinson's teen daughter was actually 27 years old – showing a "mother" and "daughter" are ostensibly in the same age bracket. This also points out that young girls should appear sexually and emotionally mature, while her mother should still be sexually available and appear young. Thus women's generations are condensed and collapsed to ensure women are unrealistically ageless and still desirable to the assumed straight male audience.

¹⁹⁴ Margarita Noriega, Jonathan Allen, and Javier Zarracina, "These Charts Prove Maggie Gyllenhaal Right about Hollywood's Ageism Problem" *Vox* (May 27, 2015). <http://www.vox.com/2015/5/27/8669309/hollywood-female-actors-age>

not only a rich case study for the study of feminist scholarship and visual rhetoric, but speaks to a timely and significant re-emergence of manicured Americana.

2.6 PUBLICS, AMERICANA, AND THE LIMITS OF VISUAL CULTURE

Americana is routinely defined as things associated with the history of the United States. Like USA-themed apparel one may buy for the Memorial Day celebrations mentioned earlier, US culture commodifies artifacts of Americana as a ritual in exercising a certain brand of citizenship. However, as Prividera and Howard argue, whiteness is often conflated with US citizenship, which others those outside of the centralized whiteness. Further, the archetypal American is not only white, but male – exposing why perhaps voters in the United States often resist women in political leadership roles as incongruous.¹⁹⁵ Thus, conservatism and its current masculine paradigm routinely resists inclusiveness, ethnic diversity, and “political correctness” and these, I argue, are coded as feminine. So in a time in which white masculine nationalists are

¹⁹⁵ For example, Cuba, Afghanistan, and China have more women in political leadership than in the United States. Several studies point out that women in politics are held to a higher standard than men in politics. Drew Desilver, “Despite Progress, U.S. Still Lags Many Nations in Women Leaders” *Pew Research* (Jan. 26, 2015), accessed January 7 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/26/despite-progress-u-s-still-lags-many-nations-in-women-leadership/>

emboldened as a “lowercase kkk,”¹⁹⁶ I question how Patsy Cline is co-opted in this narrative and how music and whiteness are involved in manifestations of Americana – the music genre.

Americana music has its own association, founded in 1999, and its own distinct aesthetic. Often promoting a style akin to Civil War garb and an aesthetic I call “antebellum hipster,” this “American roots” music undergirds problematic romanticizing of American pasts. Yet, perhaps not surprisingly, this genre is overwhelmingly white and male, reinscribing white masculinity as American.¹⁹⁷ However, what I find most interesting is that some of the biggest Americana, folk musicians are not American at all, revealing how whiteness functions as inclusive citizenship. For example, “First Aid Kit” is a Swedish duo comprised of two young white women who are sisters. They have quickly risen to stardom, pointing out their affinity for 1960s American country music like Emmylou Harris, Johnny Cash, and June Carter.¹⁹⁸ “Mumford & Sons” is a British group of four white men who are one of the more prominent Americana artists. This unique phenomenon demonstrates the privilege and fluidity of whiteness that transcends culture and reveals the racist underpinnings of what “citizenship” really means in the US. Further, this music genre that glamorizes Civil War era narratives indorses revisionist history that conflates whiteness with citizenship and thus reconstitutes “Americanness” as white, masculinity and

¹⁹⁶ Comedian Aziz Ansari argues that white nationalists known as the “alt-right” are “lowercase KKK” – less overt in their performances as a hate group but no less dangerous.

¹⁹⁷ Giovanni Russonello, “Why is a Music Genre Called ‘Americana’ So Overwhelmingly White and Male? The Genre Seeks to Represent and Celebrate a National Identity, but in the Process, It Erases the History and Diversity of Its Influences,” *The Atlantic* (Aug. 1, 2013). <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/08/why-is-a-music-genre-called-americana-so-overwhelmingly-white-and-male/278267/>

¹⁹⁸ Additionally, their song “Emmylou” references these 1960s country music artists; however, First Aid Kit’s lyrics speak of Stockholm’s cold weather, but the music video is set in the deserts of American Southwest. Both performers wear Native American inspired garb – ponchos, woven blankets, and native jewelry on top of “frontier” bohemian clothing. Additionally, they dance around smoke revealing their shadows on rock faces. This artistic approach reveals the limits and muddiness of their “Americana” aesthetic as simultaneously employing tropes of Civil War era frontier women, Native American inspired nature ceremonies, and 1960s country music that inspires the song’s lyrics, English language (not Swedish), and country genre sound. This amalgamation of “American” tropes reveals the only connective aesthetic bringing these references together is their *whiteness* that conflates these three distinct nods to Americana.

bourgeois good white girl femininity. While I am not territorializing this genre to elicit appropriation arguments, this has potential as an interesting area of future research for me in relation to whiteness, music, and visual rhetoric and who is “allowed” access to American country music derivatives and who is *not*.

Michael Warner helps to explain the ambivalence of public subjectivity in his exploration of identity, ideology, and citizenship. He argues that “the republican was to be the same as citizen and as man.” Therefore, “[h]e was to maintain continuity of value, judgment, and reputation from domestic economy to affairs of public nature. And lesser subjects – noncitizens such as women, children, and the poor – were equally to maintain continuity across both realms, as nonactors.”¹⁹⁹ The process of maintaining continuity of this ideology requires texts to create a consenting public; thus, “the text addresses me and it addresses no one in particular.”²⁰⁰ Warner’s conceptualization of a “public” echoes my arguments about Cline’s generic 1950s femininity as an “eye-con.” Cline, as a text of public memory, is co-opted by contemporary audiences who marvel at her utility as an emblem of “authentic” Americana, despite complexity and competing constructions upon further inspection. Most significantly, the public memory of Cline is mislabeled as “universal.”

Warner points out that “Publicness is always able to encode itself through the themes of universality, openness, meritocracy, and access.”²⁰¹ The noncitizens, or those of bodily difference, function to uphold the myth of utopian promises of inclusion but simultaneously mark negative difference in contrast to white, maleness. Thus, the constitutional public sphere cannot reconcile its false utopian promises, “it can only display them” often via consumer

¹⁹⁹ Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 235.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

capitalism as a flexible instrument of interpellation of prosthetic generality. So despite divisions of class, race, gender, and religion, for example, Americans are called to be complicit in a public via interpellations like “We” the people. In other words, commodities like those in civil religion (e.g., Americana clothing, Christian rituals, patriotic music) allow “a kind of access to publicness” to those outside white, maleness. I argue that Cline, as a rhetorical eye-con of “universal” Americana, provides an opportunity for people to access the “public” of utopian citizenship because of the emphasis of visual culture and white supremacy in the United States.

As Warner asserts, “to be public in the West means to have an iconicity, and this is true equally of Muammar Qaddafi and Karen Carpenter.”²⁰² While “printed public discourse formerly relied on a rhetoric of abstract disembodiment, visual media – including print – now display bodies for a range of purposes: admiration, identificaion [sic], appropriation, scandal, and so forth.”²⁰³ Because of televisual culture and visual media, Warner argues that bodies have become significant cultural texts that construct publics. Furthermore, I argue that Patsy Cline, as a *body* brought into meaning, was replaced by a public memory comprised of disembodied music and idyllic nostalgia. Thus her now drifting iconicity speciously promotes “universality” despite her co-optation by contemporary audiences as a tool to purport Americana as unequivocally white, unveiling the limits of “universality” in US visual culture.

Schwartz illuminates that dead bodies reveal rituals that articulate cultural values. The transition from “here” and embodied to “there” as memory, signals to the corpse’s significance to demarcate presence/biology from absence/memory. Once the corpse decomposes, it shifts

²⁰² Ibid., 242.

²⁰³ Ibid.

away from the deceased and becomes a site of horror. It is unstable.²⁰⁴ While we “lose” someone to death, our “loss” of a loved one can be preserved in memory. This memory, as I argue, can be fixed, ageless and thus, stable. This stability attained through ageless memory is of particular importance to narratives of the United States. Schwartz argues that the body has stood for a metaphor of the nation: the king is often a stand-in for the nation’s head – making semblance of cries such as “off with his head.” Corpses of leaders “lie in state;” martyred and mutilated bodies are use as emblems of horror, proof of (in)justice, and motivations of revolt against the State.²⁰⁵ Conversely, entombment may purport that life is eternal. What Schwartz reveals, however, is the redemptive quality of what she terms “tabloid bodies.”

She explores the death of Michael Jackson and Princess Diana as martyrs of fame – icons of anxiety and scandal in life, but in death they are redeemed. The difference, however, is that Patsy Cline’s death was not eulogized in a way that produced a distinct public. Rather, Cline’s death was definitive, and free of scandal, tawdry details, and speculation; audiences knew and believed the cause of death, and accepted the rationale for her fateful flight. Cline’s death allows her memory to be further uncomplicated; she disappeared, people mourned, and a discourse replaced her by making audiences “feel as if they are personally involved in a person’s life and death.”²⁰⁶ Friends in the industry recorded her songs as tribute, and the Grand Ole Opry performers celebrated her life and quickly reframed her legacy. Thus, Cline as a “rough” honky tonk body with a robust sex life and drinking problem, becomes a subject position. She was not a

²⁰⁴ Margaret Schwartz, *Dead Matter: The Meaning of Iconic Corpses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015), 5.

²⁰⁵ The corpse could signal defeat of the oppressor (holding up a decapitated head), serve as a warning to those who transgress or commit crime (Jesus on the cross, public executions), or signal the “cost” of conflict as sacrifice or a “waste” of human life (war photography, flag draped coffins, mass graves). See Christine Harold and Kevin Michael DeLuca, “Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 263-286.

²⁰⁶ Sara Magee, “Rest in Mediated Peace: How Entertainment Tonight’s coverage of Natalie Wood’s and John Belushi’s Deaths Helped Shape Celebrity Death Coverage” *Celebrity Studies* 5 (2014): 291-304.

corpse made into a spectacle of death; she has become Americana. Reimagined as the necessary “good white girl,” her public memory complements narratives of patriotic white masculinity, which allows her access to citizenship. As a “universal” citizen of today’s Americana, she is “just country enough to be authentic, just retro enough to be cool, and just seductive enough to be desirable.”²⁰⁷ Thus, Cline is the ideal eye-con to be used in the resurgence of Americana that has the potential to purport uncomplicated, romanticized narratives of white supremacy and elide the complexity of America’s past.

Moreover, Cline’s ongoing afterimage is further reduced in line with more truncated and uncomplicated narratives of the “good old days” supposedly free from social unrest, racism, war, and complicated identity politics. Joli Jensen argues that the currently running musical fittingly named “Always...Patsy Cline” is part of Cline’s most jarringly reductionist framing. In the promotional materials for the highly successful play that traverses the US, Cline’s smiling face is prominently displayed as a gleaming, bright white focal point. Cline’s face becomes a white mask in jarring contrast to the expansive black background, which shrouds her hair. The picture is the same one referenced for her postage stamp – a picture of *country* Cline from early in her career. Her bright red neck scarf breaks up the chiaroscuro of black and white contrasts. This unmistakably white figure is flanked by the text, “Always...Patsy Cline” in feminized, cursive script, which, like her 1988 greatest hits album, resembles an autograph or personal correspondence. The ellipsis “speaks” for the unsaid and the unfinished legacy of a limitless subject who can be whatever audiences need her to be – a blank canvas of white “universality” that undergirds civil religion in a time of social upheaval.

²⁰⁷ Joli Jensen, “‘Becoming a Postage Stamp’: Patsy Cline, Visual Image, and the Celebrity Process,” in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, ed. Warren Hofstra (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2013), 165.

Jensen argues that the “Always...Patsy Cline” is unrecognizable compared to the complicated singer she discovered trapped in the annals of a library in the late 1970s. Now, Cline is reduced to a stenciled white feminine caricature of scarf, lips, hair.²⁰⁸ This sterilized, symbolically distilled version of her, represented in today’s contemporary renderings, allows her to be a whitewashed image – as a simplified “sanctuary” in an era of visual “too muchness.”²⁰⁹ Thus, Cline’s afterimage that exists today (e.g., the highly popular play, 1993 stamp, and 1988 greatest hits album), gloss over her racial, class, and sexual transgression. Tellingly, these depictions never show her deeply scarred face. In effect, Cline is a rhetorical eye-con who audiences may have never known existed, like Rosie the Riveter, but she circulates in American public memory as a strong, caring, conservative, wholesome, feminist, physical talent “ahead of her time” and most importantly, comfortably situated in the past.

CONCLUSION

What this reveals for the study of feminist rhetorical theory and visual rhetoric is how US culture is often desperate to produce unifying feminist icons of enduring substance. Perhaps our penchant for white, ageless, constructed icons supersedes our cultural willingness to “see” ageing women with experience and authority as valuable figures, rather than a punching bag for ridicule.

²⁰⁸ Jensen, “Becoming a Postage Stamp,” 166.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

I argue that US culture's lack of older female role models has an effect in the miniscule number of women in the Senate and House, and notable absence of women in many leadership positions in American society for which they are qualified. As many contemporary feminist movements argue, "you cannot be what you cannot see" – underlining the importance of visual representation of under-represented groups, which often necessitates activism such as the remarkable 2017 Women's March that fomented a global response among women who feel they are not *seen* by those in leadership. However, there is a salient backlash against women elders who are often rendered irrelevant, incompetent, or undesirable, in order to maintain hegemonic white masculinity as proper American citizenship. Thus, visual rhetoric scholarship in conjunction with feminist criticism may allow for a scholarly space to interrogate older women's invisibility in visual culture, and because of this, a rise in constructed "eye-cons" who must fill in the blind spots of our contemporary visual culture.

3.0 CHAPTER 3: BOBBIE GENTRY

3.1 READING BETWEEN THE LINES: BOBBIE GENTRY'S STRATEGIC SILENCES

Musician and “Father of Bluegrass,” Bill Monroe, argues that country music is “plain music that tells a good story.”²¹⁰ Dolly Parton adds that country music is “just stories told by ordinary people in an extraordinary way.” Loretta Lynn recalls that her mother “taught me how to make motions with my hands in telling the story,” which helped her perform her “story-songs” on stage.²¹¹ Yet, many artists and fans insist that country music is so simple that it should not be analyzed and dissected, in fear that critics are “reading too much into it.”²¹² Country music star Emmylou Harris insists that fans like country music for its “simplicity and grace and unadornment.” Therefore, country music should hold on to its simplicity, and resist being “complicated” like other contemporary genres. However, despite country music’s signature “simplicity,” this framing does not account for the rich poetic qualities and the uniquely layered

²¹⁰ Cecelia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 7.

²¹¹ Loretta Lynn and George Vecsey, *Loretta Lynn: Coal Miner's Daughter* (Chicago: Vintage Books, 1976), 30.

²¹² Cecelia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 6.

storytelling found in many iconic country songs. Music scholar Cecelia Tichi argues that country music's poetic, narrative qualities "bring to light its subtleties, its contours, and make it possible to discover how country music allies itself with kindred art forms – the stories, poems and operative drama of American writing, thought, and culture."²¹³ Thus, country music may seem simple and pedestrian, but it is full of rich narratives, and subtle complexities.

One of the most noteworthy examples of rich storytelling and subtle complexity in contemporary country music history is the enigmatic and broadly popular song "Ode to Billie Joe," written and performed by Bobbie Gentry. This 1967 Grammy Award winning #1 smash is often perceived as a "one hit wonder" for Gentry, who rose swiftly to stardom and garnered widespread critical acclaim in part because of the mystery spurred by the song. The song details a young couple's deep, dark secret that led to the young man's suicide and the girl's isolating grief. The audience finds out that the couple was caught throwing something off the Tallahatchie Bridge, unveiling that their secret was likely an abortion that led to throwing the fetus in the river. This meaning "between the lines" was a provocative notion at the time when abortion was illegal, spurring enduring mystery, fan theories, and popularity that is still relevant today.

One the first women to write, perform, and produce her own material, Gentry would never again replicate the success of her first song, "Ode to Billie Joe."²¹⁴ However, Gentry went on to have success with 1969's "Fancy" – a #26 country hit and #31 pop hit that she also wrote and performed.²¹⁵ It was also nominated for a Grammy Award for "best female pop performance." This song, true to Gentry's Southern Gothic storytelling style made famous by "Ode," details the perils of rural poverty and the complexities of female experience through rich

²¹³ Ibid., 13.

²¹⁴ Tara Murtha, "Ode to Billie Joe" 33 1/3 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 6.

²¹⁵ "Fancy" was released as a single in November 1969 and the full album, complete with cover art, was released in May 1970.

details, literary allusion, and euphemism. Like “Ode,” “Fancy” is largely a story told as a flashback, in which a grown woman named “Fancy” recalls being groomed for sex work as a teenager by her desperate mother who wanted to ensure her daughter’s survival. In retrospect, the woman offers an empathic depiction of her mother, a raw narrative of rural poverty, and a celebratory nod to her financial independence – breaking the cycle of rural poverty by becoming a revered courtesan and worldly property owner.

I have chosen these two songs because they are Gentry’s most popular and well known songs, but, more importantly, because they offer a noteworthy opportunity to analyze how Gentry employed strategic silences that required audiences to enthymematically “read between the lines” to fill in missing meaning. These strategic silences are both a stylistic “coding” approach in line with a long tradition of musical polysemy in country music, as well as a necessary rhetorical strategy. Given the context of when these songs were published, when abortion and sex work were illegal and dangerous, Gentry has to “speak” on feminist issues that were personally important to her, by employing *silences* – as not to alienate audiences or anger powerful industry gatekeepers. In doing so, Gentry was able to “transform silence into language and action” through her “Ode to Billie Joe” lyrics that encourage audiences to reflect upon how silence functions to stifle collective grief, incite consequences, and exclude.²¹⁶ However, Gentry’s controversial 1967 lyrics that were thought to tacitly reference an abortion, led audiences and gatekeepers to interpret the elusive Gentry as a country music “outsider.”

Her follow-up hit “Fancy,” was misinterpreted and rejected by feminists in the Women’s Liberation movement because it was interpreted as glamorizing sex work. This controversy added to Gentry’s reputation as a provocative artist, reduced in the public imagination to an

²¹⁶ Lester C. Olson, “On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 49-70.

“exotic” “homewrecker.” In other words, Gentry, in echoing Audre Lorde, did not define herself for herself, leading to her being “crunched into other people’s fantasies for [her] and eaten alive.”²¹⁷ By the early-1970s, Gentry’s persona and controversial lyrics intersected – creating perplexed and suspicious gatekeepers, audiences, and feminists who did not understand her transgressive style and tended to view her unfavorably. She disappeared from the public eye in the late 1970s and the mystery about what happened to her only enhances her cryptic lyrics’ longstanding rhetorical impact. In this chapter, I trace Bobbie Gentry’s strategic silences in “Ode to Billie Joe” and “Fancy” that aim to “transform silence into language and action,” but sometimes fall short, exposing the limits placed on women’s complex musical narratives in mainstream country music.

First, I discuss pertinent literature on the role of silence in communication study and its relationship with feminist rhetoric. Then, I offer some background on Gentry as a musician, songwriter, and industry “outsider.” Next, I analyze Gentry’s impressive use of strategic silences in her 1967 and 1969 lyrics, and on-air performances, which attempt to complement her lyrics by pointing out to audiences how socially imposed silences functions to stifle collective grief, incite consequences, and exclude. Lastly, I point out how Gentry, as a woman spurring provocative discourse around women’s multifaceted issues, was misinterpreted during her career – only to be rediscovered by legions of contemporary fans now equipped to see the brave enduring, complexity of Gentry’s strategic silences.

²¹⁷ Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: Crossings, 1984), 143.

3.2 THE SUBTLETIES AND CONTOURS OF SILENCE

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mark Twain's famous quotation, "No word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause." In his unconventional autobiography of dictations, the iconic American author and lecturer quipped that "whenever I got the pause the right length, the remark that followed it was sure of a satisfactorily startling effect... I used to play with the pause as other children play with a toy."²¹⁸ Here, Twain points out his early understanding of the pause's rhetorical impact as an oratorical device. In particular, he expresses his fondness for "playing" with pauses when telling stories to different audiences. In relevance to this dissertation chapter, I interpret his ruminations about the pause as commentary on the role of silence in communication. Specifically, this literature review expounds upon the various roles of silence as a consequence of oppression and a powerful stylistic device, and, in Gentry's case, a combination of the two.

Much of communication and feminist scholarship coalesces around the value of cultivating voice; however, little scholarship explores the rhetorical potential of silence. Tillie Olsen notes that much of what one comes to term "silence" has not been natural silences such as

²¹⁸ Mark Twain, *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. 3, eds. Benjamin Griffin and Harriet Elinor Smith (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1907), 171.

“renewal, lying fallow, gestation” but the unnatural silences that are imposed.²¹⁹ Silences are imposed by various institutions and enforced by various facets of society: religious, social, and legal. Adrienne Rich argues that “where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence.”²²⁰ Kathleen Hall Jamieson notes the great lengths men have gone to silence women. She details a 17th Century practice of colonial America in which unquiet women or “nags” would be subjected to ducking stool that would drown them if they did not “renounce their verbal past.”²²¹ This was a powerful tool in conditioning women to “hold their tongue” and choose silence over the shame of reprimand and physical violence. Cheryl Glenn explains that silencing mechanisms enforced on women’s bodies often reinforce containment and enclosure: an enclosed life (domestic confinement), a closed body (chastity) and a closed mouth (silence).²²² As Campbell highlights, history rarely celebrates women’s traits; however, Aristotle touted that a woman’s silence was her “glory.” Therefore, as women began to speak in the public sphere about moral issues of consequence, they “faced obstacles unknown to men.”²²³

Unlike violent mechanisms enacted to silence women through public shaming and violence, contemporary obstacles are often enacted in less observable ways. Olsen notes that literary figures have been silenced by “Publisher’s censorship, [which entailed] refusing subject matter or treatment [it] as ‘not suitable’ or [having] ‘no market.’”²²⁴ In the music industry, this is of particular relevance. In fact, Gentry’s “Ode to Billie Joe,” was interpreted by conservative country music gatekeepers as so salacious and immoral, they did not offer her any contracts –

²¹⁹ Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978), 6.

²²⁰ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976), 204.

²²¹ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1995), 80-81.

²²² Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 312.

²²³ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*

²²⁴ Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978), 9.

claiming they could not subject impressionable audiences (i.e. women) to her tacit support of abortion. On the other hand, producer Jimmie Haskins at Los Angeles-based Capitol Records, where Gentry produced her first album, dismissed the song as mediocre. He recalls that upon hearing it, he asked another male producer, “What do you want me to do with it?” His colleague Kelly Gordon advised: “Anything. Just put some strings on it so we won’t be embarrassed. No one will ever hear it anyway.”²²⁵ Thus, Gentry faced silencing obstacles from different sides of the music industry, being rejected outright as a salacious troublemaker and then being trivialized as a forgettable musical talent, whose now epic song was relegated as a throwaway “B-side” record. As Gentry put it: “a woman doesn’t stand much chance in a recording studio.”²²⁶

Sonja Foss and Karen Foss respond to women’s historical censorship with their book *Women Speak*.²²⁷ They note how silencing mechanisms often dismiss women’s texts (e.g. letter writing, quilting, homemaking, and poetry) as trivial or embarrassing, recentering publically straight, white men’s speech in the communication discipline as sacred texts. As a way to reclaim these trivialized feminine art forms, Foss and Foss argue that these forms are women’s historical acts of *speaking*. However, mainstream media often negates women’s speech in favor of sexist depictions of women (object) by men (subject). Poet Michelle Boisseau writes that she, and other feminist writers, want “to redeem images of women from the simplistic treatments we’re typically given: the cold bitch, the virgin, the whore, the mamma...the creatures of popular culture...as well as fine art.”²²⁸ Thus, low as well as high culture restricts women’s expression and representation, often disciplining them along the intersections of gender, race, class, and age.

²²⁵ Holly George-Warren, “Mystery Girl: The Forgotten Artistry of Bobbie Gentry,” in *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music*, ed. Eric Weisbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 123.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

²²⁷ Karen A. Foss and Sonja K. Foss, eds. *Women Speak: The Eloquence of Women’s Lives* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1991).

²²⁸ Michelle Boisseau “Poetry,” in *Woman Speak: The Eloquence of Women’s Lives*, eds. Karen Foss and Sonja Foss (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. 1991), 264.

Therefore, through speech in its different instantiations, silences that disproportionately affect women are destabilized and complicated. However, some argue that this dichotomous thinking, which conflates silence with powerlessness is reductionist.

Rowe and Malhotra in their 2013 book *Silence, Feminism, Sound*, aim to complicate the “paradoxical relationship between sound and silence” that encourages an equation between voice and agency. By challenging this “binaristic relationship that has been assigned since antiquity,” they point out how listening for silences promote alliances and solidarity. They argue that this approach affords subaltern groups the chance to take a “breath” and exercise the “freedom of not having to exist constantly in reaction to what is said.”²²⁹ Lorde also challenges binaristic thinking. Lester Olson points out that Lorde’s speeches touch on how binaries between black and white, male and female, master and slave, for example, are overly simplistic and are often “useful to dominant groups for exploiting subordinate communities.”²³⁰ Olson adds that

Silence and speech should not be reduced to a simplistic opposition in which silence is negative and speech is positive, if only because there are liberating deeds done in eloquent silence and talk can conceal a significant silence.²³¹

Thus, silence can be a fluid, space of refuge.²³² Furthermore, those who *listen* for silences recognize their utility as a rhetorical strategy to promote nuance, rather than a device that reinforces binaries that equate silence with powerlessness.

²²⁹ Sheena Malhotra and Aimee Carrillo Rowe, *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2.

²³⁰ Lester C. Olson, “On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 50.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²³² Sheena Malhotra and Aimee Carrillo Rowe, *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1-2.

Jessica Enoch echoes Cheryl Glenn's charge by noting that "women still have much to tell us – all we have to do is listen to their voices and their silences."²³³ In fact, listening makes up the majority of most communication practices, but as Krista Ratcliffe illuminates "listening is rarely theorized or taught."²³⁴ Olson adds that "listening is always a difficult activity, especially when the perception of differences is great, especially when differences in underlying cultural experiences may shape our very abilities to listen."²³⁵ Therefore, feminist rhetoricians must advocate for enhanced listening practices that account for not only voices but silences, which are "both provocative and useful in fostering honest cultural and personal human engagement."²³⁶ In the words of Adrienne Rich, "Silence can be a plan / rigorously executed / the blueprint of a life / It is a presence / it is a history a form / Do not confuse it / with any kind of absence."²³⁷ Therefore, in what follows, I offer some background on Bobbie Gentry and then trace and analyze her use of strategic silences, in combination with her voice, to understand how her lyrics and performances aim to "transform silence in language and action."

²³³ Jessica Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students, 1865-1911* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 14.

²³⁴ Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 18.

²³⁵ Lester C. Olson, "On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 64.

²³⁶ Joyce Irene Middleton, "Echoes from the Past: Learning How to Listen, Again" in *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, eds. Andrea Lunsford, Kirt Wilson, and Rosa Eberly (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 367.

²³⁷ Joanne Feit Diehl, "Cartographies of Silence," in *Reading Adrienne Rich: Reviews and Re-Visions, 1951-81*, ed. Jane Roberta Cooper (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 102.

3.3 THE MYSTERY DELTA QUEEN

Many argue that silence, often recognized as a product of gender socialization, is contingent on the difficulties “women have in developing a voice of authority, despite long training and experience.”²³⁸ Therefore, it is telling that Bobbie Gentry is remembered as only “briefly touching on her hardscrabble existence in interviews” preferring to “[let] her lyrics do the talking.”²³⁹ As many fans of Gentry attest, her biggest gift is her lyrical storytelling. Rather than exercising a “voice of authority” in interviews, Gentry routinely shied away from revealing much about her personal life. Unlike my analysis in the two case studies that follow, on Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn, Bobbie Gentry is not well known. She did not write an autobiography, or allow many interviews. Then, she disappeared from the public eye around 1978, in what many call a “self-imposed exile.”²⁴⁰ No news outlets or journalists have been able to confirm her whereabouts although she is rumored to live in a large estate two hours from her birthplace in the Mississippi Delta. Thus, much of what fans and critics “know” about Gentry is through her rich, memorable lyrics.

Her two most famous and critically successful songs, “Ode to Billie Joe” (1967) and “Fancy” (1969) are ideal examples of her now signature storytelling style. Additionally, these

²³⁸ Nadya Aisenberg and Mona Harrington, “Voice of Authority,” in *Women in Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1988), 64.

²³⁹ Holly George-Warren, “Mystery Girl: The Forgotten Artistry of Bobbie Gentry,” in *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music*, ed. Eric Weisbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 125.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

songs were lucrative for Gentry, perhaps giving her the financial freedom to leave show business in her early thirties. Further, these two songs offer audiences the opportunity to personally engage in polysemic interpretation, because of their complex narrative storytelling that are layered with silences that reveal the difficulty and eloquence of women's lived experiences. While Gentry left the Mississippi Delta at the age of thirteen and moved to southern California, Gentry's music is very much rooted in her regional upbringing.

In 1944, Bobbie Gentry was born Roberta Lee Streeter in rural Chickasaw County Mississippi, an impoverished rural region now known for being a hotbed for blues, rock, and country music.²⁴¹ After her parents' divorce, her mother moved to California and soon remarried. Gentry moved in with her grandparents, where she began to cultivate her musical acumen despite living in poverty. Her grandmother, recognizing Gentry's talents, traded a milk cow for an upright piano.²⁴² Gentry embraced her church as a source of musical inspiration and learning tool. Gentry pointed out in a rare 1971 interview that

the South is very different than other parts of the country. The church was very important to us. It was in the church that I learned my music. I'd teach myself to play the piano by watchin' Ginnie Sue, the pianist at the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church.²⁴³

Gentry then lived with her father for several years before joining her mother and stepfather in southern California, where her stepfather paid for music lessons. Gentry learned how to play the guitar, bass, banjo, and percussion instrument, the vibraphone. She graduated from high school

²⁴¹ In neighboring counties, Elvis Presley and Ike Turner were also developing their musical styles.

²⁴² Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music 1800-2000* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), 324.

²⁴³ Holly George-Warren, "Mystery Girl: The Forgotten Artistry of Bobbie Gentry," in *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music*, ed. Eric Weisbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 121.

in Palm Springs in 1960 as the student body president, and then studied philosophy at UCLA and music composition at the Los Angeles Conservatory of Music.²⁴⁴ Unlike many women in country music, such as the other women I explore in this project, Gentry not only knew how to read and compose music, she spent her teen years in urban spaces, exposed to educational and artistic opportunities – available because of her stepfather’s financial stability. However, Gentry also worked several jobs as a secretary, nightclub singer, and Las Vegas showgirl, demonstrating her versatility as well as her commitment to being financially stable, which is a recurring theme in many of her songs. Additionally, her academic prowess and command of language is also reflected in her impressive songwriting.

Writing her first song at the age of seven, Gentry wrote songs throughout her childhood, adolescence, and the entirety of her career. When she committed to pursuing a career in music, she elected to first change her name. “Bobbie Gentry” is a combination of her childhood nickname for Roberta, and “Gentry” is after the lead character in the 1952 film *Ruby Gentry*. Played by actress and “brunette beauty” Jennifer Jones, Ruby Gentry was described by music journalist Holly George-Warren as a “white trash seductress.”²⁴⁵ This connotation is telling, since Gentry was often framed as a hypersexual, “exotic” beauty in part due to her style and Portuguese ancestry. However, one could argue that Ruby Gentry was not a “white trash seductress” but a noteworthy protagonist, triumphant despite being born into poverty. This “rags to riches” trope that represents financial stability is, again, a noteworthy theme in Bobbie Gentry’s music that is often misinterpreted. While Bobbie Gentry never explicitly champions women’s open sexuality, women’s hardworking reality as breadwinners, and their uninhibited pursuit of financial gain, Gentry returns to these themes over the course of her career through the

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 122.

²⁴⁵ Holly George-Warren, “Mystery Girl: The Forgotten Artistry of Bobbie Gentry,” in Weisbard, 121-2.

characters in her songs: “Fancy” (1969) an unashamed sex worker, “Beverly” (1971) a poor factory worker who laments her former financial privilege, and “Belinda” (1971) a burlesque dancer who celebrates her intellect. Here, Gentry is not personally explicit about her own identity, sexuality, and feminist sensibility, but her lyrics “do the talking for her.” Therefore, audiences and industry insiders came to many conclusions based on the lyrics of her breakout hit “Ode to Billie Joe,” but mostly talked about her *silences*.

Within a week of its August 1967 release, “Ode to Billie Joe” sold 750,000 copies, a remarkable number for the time, and spent four weeks at #1 on the *Billboard* charts ousting the Beatles’ “All You Need is Love” from its longstanding #1 spot.²⁴⁶ “Ode to Billie Joe” ultimately sold over 3 million copies and won three Grammy Awards. It was nominated in five of the existing top thirteen categories.²⁴⁷ Gentry won the Grammy for Best New Artist and Best Pop Album respectively. The Academy of Country Music also named Gentry its “Most Promising Female Singer” of 1967, exposing how her song resonated with both pop and country industries and fans.²⁴⁸ It also highlights that despite the censorship by conservative gatekeepers, Gentry’s song resonated with the country music industry and the genre’s fans. Gentry was also marketed to a wide fan base because people did not initially know what she looked like.

Since “Ode to Billie Joe” was released as a single, no accompanying photography of Gentry was included – making her visual identity a mystery to fans for weeks until the full album was released. This visual entymematic silence, while seemingly innocuous, was actually very fortuitous for her career. Radio station programmers had no idea what Gentry looked like, which complicated their job of categorizing her sound to fit an established genre. Notoriously,

²⁴⁶ George-Warren, 124.

²⁴⁷ Staff Writer, ““Billie Joe’ Nominated Top Song” *The Tennessean* (Feb. 12, 1968), 1.

²⁴⁸ Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music 1800-2000* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), 324.

“Southern” themed music made by Black artists was called the blues; white artists played country music.²⁴⁹ Without the possibility of racial profiling, the song was promoted to and embraced by pop, country, folk-rock, easy listening, R&B, and soul audiences.²⁵⁰ Additionally, when pressed about her ambiguous style of music, Gentry responded, “I don’t sing white or colored, I just sing Southern,” revealing her strategic straddling of genres indicative of the musical amalgamation of the Mississippi Delta.²⁵¹

Nicknamed the “Delta Queen,”²⁵² the “Chickasaw Country Child,” the “Cajun Queen” by fans and industry insiders, Gentry was always identified through her “Southern” ethos as a way to stabilize her ambiguous, complex musical style and persona. While the Mississippi Delta, Chickasaw County, and Louisiana Cajun regions are all distinct and disparate, Gentry was consistently rooted in and defined through the “South.” This monolithic framing of Gentry was both specific, to rationalize her categorization as a country singer, but also vague – conflating cultures and regions that span around 400 miles. During her short-lived but lucrative tenure hosting her own Vegas show in the early 1970s, Gentry would routinely reference her ambiguity as a Southerner. She tells her audiences that everyone knows she is from the South, but they often assume she “just sort of, arose out of the swamp fog...but what most people don’t realize, is that I left there when I was very young.” Here, Gentry points out how her past is constructed and revisioned to fit her supposed musical style, not the other way around. Like her

²⁴⁹ This trend dates back to when Appalachian folk music, heavily influenced by African Americans’ musical traditions, developed a segregationist attitude and alienated Black performers. Minstrel shows exacerbated this often arbitrary divide. Thus Appalachian music split into bluegrass (white performers) and blues (Black performers). For a more in-depth look at this history, see Tony Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 143-170.

²⁵⁰ Murtha, “Ode to Billie Joe,” 3.

²⁵¹ Staff writer, “Bobbie to Strum for P.C.” *The Tennessean* (Nov. 26, 1967): 1.

²⁵² In particular, Johnny Cash called Gentry the “Mississippi River Delta Queen” when introducing her on his show, *The Johnny Cash Show* (1969-1971).

indistinguishable public persona and atypical musical style, she is thought to have emerged mysteriously from indiscriminate “swamp fog,” which helps to enhance her now mythic elusiveness. Gentry illuminates this inconsistency, potentially further destabilizing her persona by pointing out that she has, in fact, spent most of her adult life in western cities such as Palm Springs, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. However, Gentry to stabilize these inconsistencies, Gentry reminds her audience that she will continue to write songs about the “South.” Perhaps based on her success with “Ode to Billie Joe” and “Fancy,” she has found that songs rooted in Mississippi and Louisiana transcend region and genre, connecting with audiences even today.

3.4 SILENCE, GRIEF, AND CHALLENGING RURAL STOICISM

1967’s “Ode to Billie Joe” tells the story of a teenage couple in the Mississippi Delta who share a dark secret that ultimately leads to the boy’s suicide and the girl’s endless bereavement. Gentry’s “rich details of rural farm life render ‘Ode’ more a short story than a pop song,” highlighting its popularity in the country music industry, which champions storytelling.²⁵³ While Gentry provides “rich details” of rural life, she simultaneously omits details by employing strategic silences. Gentry writes, “It was the third of June another sleepy dusty Delta day / I was out choppin’ cotton and my brother was balin’ hay.” Gentry takes care in establishing the setting

²⁵³ George-Warren, 122.

for the song, constructing notions of “Southern” life that are both perfunctory and romanticized. When the young girl, who is the narrator, and her brother entered her home to eat, “mama hollered out the back door, y’all, remember to wipe your feet.” Then her mother casually declares, “I got some news this mornin’ from Choctaw Ridge / Today Billy Joe MacAllister jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge.”²⁵⁴ By combining the everyday domestic task of wiping your feet to remove the agrarian mud and dust, with the suicide of a young man, Gentry exposes the matter-of-fact disassociated stoicism of rural life.

Many scholars have noted the mental toll of stoicism on males who are often discouraged from expressing feelings outside of anger.²⁵⁵ In fact, silence is often understood as a product of gender socialization. Many argue that rural stoicism correlates to the number of suicides among men – disproportionately in rural regions, where very few mental health resources are available, stigma about mental illness permeates, and men routinely have access to firearms.²⁵⁶ Further, the young girl recounts her unfeeling Papa say: “Well, Billy Joe never had a lick of sense. Pass the biscuits please.” Again, Gentry sets up a telling juxtaposition between callously speaking ill of the deceased and a mindless instruction over a family meal, which led to this line being one of the more memorable phrases from the song. In her essay on the disparate ways cultures confront death and its grief, Camille Paglia offers an explanation for rural stoicism:

country people are notoriously blunt and unsentimental about accidents and disasters, which traumatize today’s squeamish, overprotected middle-class professionals. Bobbie Gentry’s 1967 hit song, “Ode to Billie Joe,” preserves something of that premodern

²⁵⁴ In the lyrics, his name is spelled “Billy Joe.” The song’s title was incorrectly printed upon its release, spelling his name “Billie Joe.”

²⁵⁵ Greg Murray, Fiona Judd, Henry Jackson, Caitlin Fraser, Angela Komiti, Pip Pattison, Alex Wearing, Garry Robins, “Big boys Don’t Cry: An Investigation of Stoicism and Its Mental Health Outcomes,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 44 (2008): 1369-1381.

²⁵⁶ Margaret Alston, “Rural Male Suicide in Australia,” *Social Science & Medicine* 74 (2010): 515-522.

flavor when a crusty farmer, indifferent to his daughter's feelings, reacts to the news of a young man's fatal plunge off a bridge by remarking, "Well, Billie Joe never had a lick of sense. Pass the biscuits, please."²⁵⁷

While Paglia explains how rural stoicism is stingingly evident in the lyrics, her analysis does not account for Billy Joe's suicide – which is not technically an "accident" or "disaster." His choice to end his life challenges her claim that country people in this case (i.e. white men) are "unsentimental." As Kimmel points out, suicide has been the leading cause of agricultural fatalities for the last two decades – by far.²⁵⁸ Perhaps unlike Papa, Billie Joe McAllister was full of feeling, and audiences want to know why.

Three stanzas into the song, the audience still does not know much about Billy Joe or the narrator's relationship to him. As her brother recalls a friendly memory of Billy Joe, he interjects to ask "wasn't [you] talkin' to him after church last Sunday night?" revealing that the narrator was in fact a friend of Billy Joe. The audience learns more when Mama inquires "Child, what's happened to your appetite? ...you haven't touched a single bite." The audience is then invited to fill in the missing meanings: the girl and Billy Joe were friendly; the girl is too sick or upset to eat; they must have been closer than any of her family members realize. Further, her Mama says "that nice young preacher, Brother Taylor, dropped by today...Oh, by the way, he said he saw a girl that looked a lot like you up on Choctaw Ridge. / And she and Billy Joe was throwing somethin' off the Tallahatchie Bridge." Only at this line does the audience link the discarded "somethin'" as a possible reason for the teen boy's suicide.

²⁵⁷ Camille Paglia, "The Italian Way of Death" *Death: A Salon Special Issue* (2002): 122-3.

²⁵⁸ Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), 247.

Contemporary musician Lucinda Williams noted that when she first heard the mesmerizing “Ode to Billie Joe,” “nobody knew what she threw off the Tallahatchie Bridge. I was taught to think it was probably a baby. That’s major stuff; it’s deep and dark.”²⁵⁹ In her exploration of the Southern Gothic literary tradition, Teresa Goddu highlights that many people have assumed that authors write about deeply flawed characters to foster “escapism” for the reader. However, Goddu argues that “the gothic gives voice to cultural contradictions” that are otherwise repressed. In other words, the gothic is not escapist but a manifestation of the taboo anxieties that are unable to be openly discussed.²⁶⁰ Assuming Gentry’s story is alluding to her secret abortion, highlights why Gentry used strategic silence to encourage contemplation and discourse among listeners. Since Williams notes that she “was taught” to think it was a baby, unveils that the silences from the song were transformed into language and potentially meaningful discourse about women’s complex lived realities. When asked in a 1968 interview what they threw off the bridge, Gentry “smiled and stated for the umpteenth time, ‘I’ll never tell.’”²⁶¹ Gentry’s reluctance to fill in the missing meaning for her audiences not only spurs language into action, it also exposes the risk one faces when engaging and critiquing serious legal and cultural structures informed by patriarchy.

Goddu notes that today’s country music has been problematically “cleaned up” to avoid such risk. Thus, performers no longer engage with the politically charged “dark side” of country music’s Southern Gothic roots. However, when country’s haunting and transgressive narratives do offer commentary on social anxieties and problematic structures, they almost always have to

²⁵⁹ Lucinda Williams, “I Heard Bobbie Gentry on the Radio, When Radio Was Great,” *Rolling Stone* 934 (2003): 66.

²⁶⁰ Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 13-14.

²⁶¹ Kathy Sawyer, “Bobbie’s a One-Man Woman – But She Won’t Tell Who He Is” *The Tennessean* (Oct. 29, 1967), accessed June 6, 2015.

resituate “traditional parameters of patriarchal control” as a way to maintain the status quo.²⁶² For example, when Mary Chapin Carpenter was interviewed about her 1993 feminist song “He Thinks He’ll Keep Her,” the journalist asked if the song had “any *Thelma and Louise* motivations” or other “gothic” themes. Here Carpenter is encouraged to conflate feminist themes, a popular mainstream movie that centers two female protagonists, and the gothic tradition. In other words, the journalist invites Carpenter to sidestep her gender transgressions by framing her feminist commentary as indicative of a dark, “threatening” genre incompatible with what she must be trying to attain – a likable apolitical persona befitting a young blonde woman in country music.²⁶³ Meanwhile, Garth Brooks is afforded the freedom to indulge in “dark” transgression with his artistic music videos without ever being pressed to explain and defend any deeper meanings. For example, Brooks’s 1993 music video, for the song “The Red Strokes,” uses excessive blood and shadows to reference domestic violence, jealous rage, and murder. Goddu argues that “by abstracting passion, Brooks can indulge his excesses without suffering any of the consequences.”²⁶⁴ In effect, Brooks frees his fans from having to confront actual social issues that challenge patriarchal order. Also, journalists did not insist he explain his motivations or suspicious agenda. Moreover, the Southern Gothic tradition is lauded as dark and mysterious, until it transgresses social order. Then, the female artist is often questioned, censored, and potentially punished. Therefore, it makes sense that Gentry commits to strategic silences.

²⁶² Teresa Goddu, “Bloody Daggers and Lonesome Graveyards: The Gothic and Country Music” in *Reading Country Music*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 61.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

Rather than acquiescing to journalists' demands to know what the teens threw off the bridge, Gentry never divulged. However, she did release a statement years later regarding the curiosity. Gentry stated:

These questions [regarding what the teens threw off the bridge] are of secondary importance in my mind. The story of Billy Joe has two more interesting underlying themes. First, the illustration of a group of people's reaction to the life and death of Billy Joe, and its subsequent effect on their lives is made. Second, the obvious gap between the girl and her mother is shown when both women experience a common loss (first Billy Joe and later Papa), and yet Mama and the girl are unable to recognize their mutual loss or share their grief.²⁶⁵

Gentry, by alluding to the mutual loss experienced by both women, is commenting on the silencing potential of grief. At the conclusion of "Ode to Billie Joe," the narrator notes that her brother has married and moved out of the house, her father has passed away, and her mother "doesn't seem to wanna do much of anything" because of her depression following Papa's untimely death. The narrator, in closing, shares, "And me, I spend a lot of time pickin' flowers up on Choctaw Ridge / and drop them into the muddy water off the Tallahatchie Bridge." Despite their grief, the mother and daughter are unable to listen to and engage each other because of their stoic silences. Audre Lorde notes that childhood experiences such as abuse are undoubtedly linked to silence because, "As children we absorbed that hatred, passed it through ourselves...Echoes of it return."²⁶⁶ Thus, the girl, having been exposed to her Papa's cold indifference about death, may replicate this stoic dismissiveness – stifling her into silence.

²⁶⁵ Chris Parton, "Flashback: Bobbie Gentry Haunts Radio with Mysterious Suicide Ballads," *Rolling Stone* (2015), 1. Accessed November 2016. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/flashback-bobbie-gentry-haunts-radio-with-mysterious-suicide-ballad-20150727> Jesse Russell and Ronald Cohn, *Ode to Bobbie Gentry* (Book on Demand, 2012), 124.

²⁶⁶ Audre Lorde, "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger," in her *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: Crossings, 1984), 146.

Gentry's strategic silences about isolation and grief were further highlighted in her visual depiction of the song on the *Smothers Brothers Show*.

In the 1960s, the *Smothers Brothers Show* was seen as rebellious, liberal, and subversive.²⁶⁷ For example, during a televised special, white singer Petula Clark reached out and touched the arm of Black singer Harry Belafonte during an on-air duet. A Chrysler executive, responsible for sponsoring the nationally televised event, demanded a re-taping without any interracial touching. Clark, however, argued that the original taping should air, and to ensure it did, she destroyed all other footage of alternative performances.²⁶⁸ Thus, the *Smothers Brothers Show* built a reputation as an “uncensored” space willing to push boundaries of social commentary without succumbing to racist, hegemonic expectations. Further, the summer of 1967 was marked by race riots in Detroit and President Johnson's order to send 45,000 more troops to Vietnam. Therefore, protest folk musicians like Peter Seeger were in high demand. Seeger opened the *Smothers Brothers Show*'s second season, followed by Gentry, who served as “an obvious bridge between Seeger's folk purism and the new genre known as folk rock.”²⁶⁹ This television appearance was significant for Gentry because it opened up her music to a wide audience but also allowed her to offer visual commentary that complemented her rich lyrics.

In all of Gentry's on-air performances of “Ode to Billie Joe” that I have viewed either online or through archival research in Nashville, her appearance on the *Smothers Brothers Show* stands out as particularly stylistic and visually arresting. Judith Lancioni in her analysis of documentary film argues that the movement of cameras instructs the audience to linger upon certain key elements, creating a system of valuation that invites to viewer to focus on some

²⁶⁷ David Bianculli, *Dangerously Funny: The Uncensored Story of the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

things and ignore others. I argue that the camera work that focuses on Gentry's face creates a visual rhythm that is intimate, confessional, and desexualizes the musician – who later became a sex symbol.

In the beginning of Gentry's on-air performance of "Ode to Billie Joe," the camera descends rapidly from a large translucent window shade, to reveal Gentry on the other side, offering a somewhat modified "stage curtain" to expose the performer; however, this "curtain" is raised to welcome the audience inside a home, not a stage. We as the audience recognize this as the signal to the beginning of the performance – the shrouded star is revealed. Additionally, Gentry is prominently displayed as the focal point of the camera shot, wearing a bright green shift dress, donning her signature smoky eyeliner that matched her voluminous black hair. She is delicately sitting down, holding her guitar snug to her torso. The camera, once positioned on Gentry, does not move at all for the first stanza of the song. The viewer becomes a fixed audience member; the camera and viewer do not wander.

This fixed point of view reflects the audience as motionless, passive receivers who are invited to focus on Gentry, her voice, and her lyrics. However, as Gentry moves into her second stanza, so does the camera, and the audience's role changes to a more active one. Once Gentry's lyrics shift to the verbal comments of her family members (i.e., Papa, Mama and brother), the camera quickly pans behind Gentry to reveal white, motionless mannequins around a darkly colored dinner table. Because these characters are "speaking" through the lyrics in Gentry's song, the audience understands that these lifeless and emotionless entities are representative of her stoic, unfeeling family. The producer of the show elected to do this camera work to assist Gentry in offering commentary on the silencing potential of grief that is exacerbated by rural stoicism. In other words, these artistic choices are what Burke calls "eloquent text," focusing

audience attention on the *presentation* of information rather than on the information itself.²⁷⁰ This artistic display suggests that the audience is no longer passive, but being transported from the dinner table back to the girl's intimate, confessional narration. Ironically, the girl never speaks in the song, but confesses to her audience – revealing her projection of familial alienation, while highlighting her confessional intimacy with the listener. bell hooks notes that confession and truth telling are powerful tools that allow one to “put the broken bits and pieces of the heart back together again” in a way that tells “the past as we have learned it mouth-to-mouth, telling the present as we see, know, and feel it in our hearts and with our words.”²⁷¹ Lorde writes that “we have been socialized to respect fear far more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence... silence will choke us to death.”²⁷² Gentry highlights this conundrum by intimately singing to her audience, yet pointing out the girl's stifling silence, that may choke her to death. Therefore, hooks argues that the necessary process of confession in one's own words, embodies feminist initiatives because it reaffirms “the power of the personal” in using one's experience strategically to evoke political change and “transform the world.”²⁷³

Gentry's eerie and visually arresting depiction of “Ode to Billie Joe” spurred significant discourse and great curiosity about the song. According to journalist Chris Parton, Gentry “has done the musical world a favor by not sharing what really happens. The mystery is far more interesting than the any revelation could hope to be.” This explains why Gentry's *Smothers Brothers Show* performance is still widely circulated online. In the comments sections, seemingly endless commentary expresses fans' affinity for the song, for Gentry as an artist, their

²⁷⁰ Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 37-39.

²⁷¹ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989), 2-3.

²⁷² Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language into Action,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: Crossings, 1984), 44.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 111.

nostalgic recollection of when they first heard the song, and most importantly their theories on what the narrator was *really* saying. Gentry, in effect, transformed silence into language and potentially impacted second wave discussions that led to the legalization of abortion in 1973. However, what many people ignore is that perhaps Gentry was famously mysterious about her lyrics because of the potential consequences and institutional censorship. Further, if the girl in the song were to “break” her silence and open up to her family about what she and Billy Joe had thrown off the bridge, she may be the target of swift consequence and risk further straining her relationships with family members.

3.5 SILENCE AND CONSEQUENCE: LEGAL, RELIGIOUS, AND SOCIAL RISK

Celeste Condit’s book *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric* details the contextual constraints posed on women before the 1973 outcome of legal case “Roe v. Wade.” Despite conventional wisdom that insists abortions have always been illegal prior to 1973, Condit highlights that between 1870 and 1950, as many as 30,000 abortions were done legally each year in the nation’s hospitals.²⁷⁴ However, in the 1950s, physicians who had been in legal control of abortion decisions for decades began to feel the weight of this responsibility and its power; therefore, many doctors turned this responsibility over to hospital committees who often agreed to

²⁷⁴ Celeste Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 22.

abortions only if there was a “risk to the mother’s life.” Women, who sought abortions outside of this approved rationale, began to seek illegal, high-risk abortions. In response, the 1959 American Law Institute approved abortions for cases of rape, incest, fetal deformity, and threats to the pregnant woman’s health.²⁷⁵ However, women still ended up in hospitals due to health complications from illegal “back alley” abortions that circumvented health care institutions. Condit notes that women had not yet articulated a legitimate public voice; therefore, the seemingly dormant issue of abortion began to require public attention.²⁷⁶ In effect, the *silenced* issue was becoming voiced and sometimes intimated through rhetorical indirection.

Condit argues that the success of pro-choice sentiment stemmed from media’s framing of anti-abortion legislation on “good” women – white, married, loving mothers. By distributing the horrifying narratives of illegal abortions enacted on “good” women, Condit argues that it was effective in showing why legal abortions must be available in these particular cases. For example, Sherri Finkbine was the pregnant, married, mother of four who hosted a children’s television program in the early 1960s. After she found out that a medication she ingested caused severe infant deformities, she sought a legal abortion in 1962 but advocates like the Catholic Church publically criticized her. Therefore, she ended up flying to Sweden to have one.²⁷⁷ This highlights the disparity between high profile cases like Finkbine and the lived reality of the girl in “Ode to Billie Joe.”

The juxtaposition between Finkbine and the character in Gentry’s song highlights how abortion rhetoric of the 1950s and 1960s often promoted a shared myth that those needing legal abortions were married, middle class, white mothers, which did not account for poor, unmarried

²⁷⁵ Anthony Lewis, (May 1959). “Legal Abortions Proposed in Code.” *New York Times* (May 22, 1959), 15.

²⁷⁶ Celeste Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 23.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

women (of color). More importantly, these women were not often seen as sympathetic, so their needs were silenced by media and by medical discourse. This institutional and systemic silence illuminates how Gentry's song transformed the silence into language and action. By discussing a narrative in her lyrics that features the difficult lived reality of a poor, rural, disenfranchised girl unable to speak of her experience, Gentry points out a glaring omission in abortion rhetoric. Further, this historical moment when Gentry released the song reveals why Gentry felt compelled to write it, but also why she was so cryptic as not to draw ire about abortion: both morally and legally. Women faced significant backlash, as many experience today, because women who seek abortion are routinely framed selfish and negative. Further, pro-life sentiment demands rights for fetuses, but not the mothers who are being forced to raise them. Lastly, by stigmatizing mothers who need government resources to raise the child that many demanded she not abort, pro-life leaders and politicians force mothers into shameful double binds. Gentry, by creating relatable, memorable characters, promotes a possibility for understanding and empathy rather than judgment.

Gentry's 1969 song "Fancy" reveals Gentry's emphasis on empathy and the redeemable qualities of complex women who are routinely dismissed simply as immoral. However, this song also reveals how Gentry was misunderstood in her narrative, prompting some backlash. Some of the backlash, unexpectedly, was from fellow women, feminists, and other social progressives who lacked an understanding of extreme poverty. The song "Fancy" tells the story of a young girl, named Fancy, being groomed for sex work by her impoverished mother. Gentry writes, "I remember it all very well looking back / it was the summer I turned eighteen. / We lived in a one room run-down shack on the outskirts of New Orleans." Like "Ode to Billie Joe," Gentry sets a richly detailed setting and clearly situates it in a Southern region recognizable to

disparate audiences. Like, “Ode,” this song details the tough decisions women must make in desperation. The narrator sings,

We didn't have money for food or rent / to say the least, we were hard pressed. Then
mama spent every last penny she had to buy me a dancin' dress / Mama washed and
combed and curled my hair / and she painted my eyes and lips...starin' back from the
looking glass standin' was a woman / where a half-grown kid had stood.

However, Gentry is careful not to vilify the mother character – who she argues deserves the audience's empathy. She explained that mama

kissed my cheek / Then I saw the tears welling up / in her troubled as she started to speak
...she looked at me and took a ragged breath / She's said your pa's runned off, and I'm
real sick / and the baby's gonna starve to death.

Fancy confesses that “the wheels of fate had started to turn / and for me there was no way out / it wasn't very long 'til I knew exactly what my mama was talkin' about.” These lyrics invite listeners to complete the silences and unstated details of sex work.

Gentry uses this opportunity to try to promote empathy between women across chasms of economic class that oftentimes divides the women's movement. Fancy implies that she now understands that her mother was preparing her to become a sex worker in New Orleans. However, I also interpret this line to mean that she now understands what her mother had been through – she came to empathize with her mother's silent struggle of being a grown woman living in poverty, dependent on men for financial security. With this mutual understanding, the young girl is able to connect with her mother and seek pride in her identity, even though her mother has now died. Fancy, upon this realization, states, “I did what I had to do, but I made

myself this solemn vow, / that I was gonna' be a lady someday / though I didn't know when or how." Audre Lorde writes that one must resist the impetus to only "pluck" one aspect of themselves as a meaningful whole. This process eclipses the importance of one's intersectional identity. In other words, Fancy may be a "prostitute" however, she elects to not define herself by this. Rather, Fancy "couldn't see spendin' the rest of my life with my head hung down in shame / I might have been born just plain white trash, / but Fancy was my name." Fancy, thus recognizes her mother's desperation, her lack of options, and the potential benefits of sex work – even if she will be openly criticized and condemned.

Fancy and her mother anticipate moral and religious consequence. Mama begs, "Lord, forgive for what I do," for her role in this sinful and illegal approach to ensure her daughter's survival. Fancy defiantly states: "Now in this world, there's a lot of self-righteous / hypocrites who call me bad / They criticize mama for turning me out / No matter how little we had." This defiant, transgressive posturing of Fancy was misinterpreted by many country music audiences. Viewed as unsympathetic, hypersexual, and glamorizing of sex work, the song "Fancy" was largely rejected by the Women's Liberation movement. However, Gentry states that in fact "Fancy' is my strongest statement for women's lib., if you really listen to it. I agree wholeheartedly with the movement and all the serious issues that they stand for – equality, equal pay, day care centers, and abortion rights."²⁷⁸ Ironically, over two decades later when "Fancy" was recorded by country star Reba McEntire in 1990, it was celebrated as a feminist anthem designed to champion women's success and financial independence despite adversity. I argue that fans and country music insiders misinterpreted Gentry's song because her now hypersexual persona was conflated with the character of Fancy – stigmatizing the singer who was not as

²⁷⁸ Jesse Russell and Ronald Cohn, *Ode to Bobbie Gentry* (Norderstedt, Germany: Books on Demand, 2012).

strategically silent as she was when writing “Ode to Billie Joe.” In effect, Gentry was silenced through exclusion by both the Women’s Liberation movement and social conservatives. This othering process that rendered Gentry an outsider is most obvious through analysis of her shifting visual depictions from her breakout success in 1967 with “Ode to Billie Joe” to her 1969 release of “Fancy.”

SILENCE AND EXCLUSION: GENTRY AS “OUTSIDER”

Gentry, photographed for her 1967 album cover, conveys a youthful, moral image that I argue helped neutralize the backlash for her transgressive song “Ode to Billie Joe.” On the cover of the album, Gentry is playing her guitar while perched on an austere fence. She wears a cream colored t-shirt, blue jeans, and no shoes. Gentry is not confrontational with her gaze. Rather, she is comfortably consumed by the viewer as an unthreatening musician rather than an entertainer.²⁷⁹ Her eyes are casted outward to her right as she appears to be looking at or for someone that the audience cannot see. This large empty space on the cover acts as its own silence. She is surrounded with verdant trees and shrubbery that is unlike foliage in the “dusty” Delta; however, the album insists that she is amidst a rural landscape. Gentry’s framing is

²⁷⁹ Her “natural” aesthetic, specifically her hair, contrasts other country stars of the time, which reveals a possible marketing ploy to attract specific crossover youth culture – college students listening to folk rock who may otherwise resist country music.

incongruous to her later “Delta Queen” aesthetic, which took shape during her time headlining Vegas performances and hosting television shows. On the back cover of the same 1967 “Ode” album is a black and white photo of Gentry’s smiling face – her guitar perched on her shoulder. Again, the cover design features Gentry as an unthreatening musician and songwriter; her body is deemphasized.

Gentry’s 1970 “Fancy” album cover departs from her earlier neutralized image.²⁸⁰ The cover art on the 1970 album depicts artist Bobbie Gentry *as* the character “Fancy.” The cover is a print of a painting that depicts Gentry wearing Fancy’s “dancin’ dress” that is described in the song’s lyrics. Gentry wears Fancy’s satin dress, which was “red, velvet-trimmed” with a “split on the side clean up to my hips.” Further, the cover art features “Fancy” in a red-walled parlor with one grasping a couch, and the other holding a long-stemmed cigarette. She gazes at the viewer with her upper thigh exposed; her feather boa hangs from her shoulder. Her signature black hair offers contrast to the dominant red colors. Moreover, the cover art conflates Gentry and the character, and in turn, overtly sexualizes Gentry. Gentry presents herself as identifying with Fancy. Interestingly, this artwork was painted by Gentry herself – revealing her wide range of artistic talents that were largely overshadowed by her escalating sexualization in the media, which rendered her an exotic outsider in country music.

Gentry has been described as a “slinky,” “exotic beauty” of Portuguese decent with “raven hair and dark, luminous eyes,” revealing her eroticized framing that was often viewed against white Anglo-Saxon notions of beauty and respectable femininity.²⁸¹ Her voice has been

²⁸⁰ The song “Fancy” was released as a single in November of 1969. The full album, with its memorable cover, was released in May of 1970.

²⁸¹ George-Warren, 121, 125.

described as “swampy, smoky, whiskey stained,”²⁸² “sultry and conversational,” which often sounded “as if she recorded the song while sprawled across ruffled satin sheets.”²⁸³ Musician Rosanne Cash recalls that Gentry’s “voice reminds me of Sophia Loren’s body – all woman, dark, curvy, seductive, vulnerable.”²⁸⁴ By equating Gentry’s voice to an Italian actress and sex symbol, Cash swiftly sexualizes Gentry’s voice, which complicates discourse on silence.

Even Gentry’s voice is othered. First, she is rendered foreign – being compared to an international sex symbol with an Italian accent. While some argue that being seen as foreign is a compliment in recognition of her worldly education and artistic acumen, for example, I argue that this is not the case in country music. Country music routinely lauds passive white banal femininity and rugged white masculinity as idealized US citizenship. European men are sometimes criticized as being liberal, intellectual, or effeminate, which are characteristics routinely framed as incongruous with the archetype of the cowboy. Malin, in his 2010 book on contemporary American masculinity, points out that after 9/11 Americans viewed France as an “empathetic friend” however, after France resisted militaristic invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, it was a country of “effeminate cowards.”²⁸⁵ European women, on the other hand, are reduced to sexually liberated seductresses as the foil for spiritual virtue, or overly affectionate mothers – especially in comparison to rural stoicism informed by fundamentalist Christianity.²⁸⁶ Further,

²⁸² Williams, 66.

²⁸³ George-Warren, 127. The term “exotic” reinforces the assumption of a white, male audience and invisible white standard. Through a label of exotic, Gentry is assumed to be hypersexual but also available for white men’s consumption. This sexualized process of “othering” situates Gentry as intriguingly outside of (Anglo-Saxon) whiteness, yet still able to harness white privilege, unlike other women of color in music who were labeled “exotic” such as Tina Turner, for example.

²⁸⁴ As cited in George-Warren, 124.

²⁸⁵ Brenton Malin, *American Masculinity Under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties “Crisis of Masculinity”* (New York: Peter Lang), 164.

²⁸⁶ Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 11.

white male traditionalists, often attracted to country music, see immigration as an opportunity to “defend against invasion.”²⁸⁷

Further, and most significantly, Cash renders Gentry’s voice a body to be ogled. While I do not think Cash meant to be pointed in her framing of Gentry, her rhetoric “conceals as much as it reveals.”²⁸⁸ Her framing diminishes the significance of voice – particularly for a member of a marginalized group. In other words, Gentry’s voice is her professional tool to garner income, her outlet for artistic expression, and her way to communicate as an agent and furtive feminist. However, this nuance and complexity is equated to a “seductive” “dark” body. The “logic” of this fixation on Gentry’s “sexy” sounding voice, negates the content of Gentry’s lyrics. Rather, it repositions her value as a sexy licentious body to be enjoyed by audiences.

Additionally, like Patsy Cline, Gentry’s personal life colored her public perception, revealing sexist double standards that rendered her an outsider. Capitol Records music producer Kelly Gordon who initially panned “Ode to Billie Joe,” fell in love with Gentry and supposedly left his wife and children for her. This fueled unfavorable rumors about the young, unmarried “homewrecker;” and, unsurprisingly, Gordon was not criticized, even though he was the one who was married. Fans and industry insiders questioned Gentry’s perceived immorality; although there is little evidence that Gentry ever maintained a relationship with Gordon, yet she was rendered the scapegoat.²⁸⁹ In this instance, I wonder if the “homewrecker” narrative was circulated merely to fit her rhetorical image as a seductress as her “Delta Queen” nickname aimed to reinforce her questionable Southern identity.

²⁸⁷ Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2013), 57.

²⁸⁸ Raymie McKerrow. “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 92.

²⁸⁹ George-Warren, 123-7.

Her hypersexualized persona was compounded by classist assumptions, which further alienated her from country music “authenticity.” While she had more traditional education than most women in all of country music, many audiences may have misinterpreted “Fancy” as an autobiographical account, collapsing the distinction between the singer and persona of her song. Lorde points out that if one does not explicitly identify themselves, they will be defined by others to one’s detriment. Thus, I argue that Gentry was so private, audiences desperately “read between the lines” in problematic ways that fostered misinterpretation. For example, Fancy was “plain white trash” who became an uptown “lady” through sex work. Additionally, this character boasted at the end of the song about her financial success. Fancy sings: “I charmed a king, a Congressman, and an occasional Aristocrat / Then I got me a Georgia mansion and an elegant New York Town House Flat. And I ain’t done bad.” While many musicians’ songs are not autobiographical, and artists use characters or personae to tell stories, presumptions concerning Gentry’s life undoubtedly informed audiences’ interpretations of this song in particular.

In December 1969, at the age of twenty-seven, Gentry married fifty-eight year old Bill Harrah, the casino magnate who was one of the richest men in Nevada. They divorced four months later in April of 1970, which would likely lead some to speculate that she strategically married him for access to his money. Especially, since a newspaper reporter claimed, in an article detailing Gentry and Harrah’s separation, that Gentry said her dream in life was “one day, to be rich and idle.”²⁹⁰ Yet, oddly, I did not find any newspaper clippings or interviews that overtly criticize or question this marriage and subsequent divorce – despite the sizable age gap, prompt dissolution of the union, and his fortune being made from gambling, which was illegal in most states. I take this “silence” as a tacit endorsement of or indifference to her personal life.

²⁹⁰ Staff Writer, “Bobbi Gentry [sic], Reno Casino King Separate” *The Tennessean* (April 14 1970), accessed June 5 2015,

Yet, this “real life” narrative coincided with the release of “Fancy,” which garnered criticism from conservative and liberal audiences. In other words, fans criticized Gentry’s work but not her marital choices, which problematically reinforces rather predictable sexist messages that reward women’s marriage as a source of income but disparage her paid work outside the home.

Gentry’s own songs illuminate the very double standards that attempt to silence her. Gentry is derided for creating a character who embraces necessary sex work for financial survival, yet women routinely marry for financial stability and are applauded. In the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*, Venus Xtravaganza is an escort and sex worker who succinctly explains the problem with stigmatizing sex workers but not wives.²⁹¹ In effect, she encourages the audience to question why, in US culture, we harshly judge and criminalize the entrepreneurial enterprise of sex work.²⁹² I share this full quotation to reveal why Gentry’s song “Fancy,” which attempted to promote empathy toward desperate women, was so noteworthy – especially back in 1970. Venus Xtravaganza states:

[my date is] taking me out for dinner later this evening, or for cocktails after midnight. I know he’ll give me some money just for me to maybe buy some shoes and a nice dress, so that the next time he sees me, he’ll see me looking more and more beautiful, the way he wants to see me. But I don’t have to go to bed with him, or anything like that. At times they do expect sexual favors, but that is between myself and them, so I don’t want to talk about that any further. At most times, 99 percent of the time they don’t. 95 percent of the

²⁹¹ It is important to note that more criticism of women’s choices is not my goal, but rather I aim to highlight inconsistencies and hypocrisies that stigmatize sex workers without critically engaging how marriages are historically based on a somewhat comparable sexual exchange. Further, patriarchal marriages that assume wives are property of men are historically legal contracts that are predicated on women’s sexual commodity as virgins to legitimize the husband’s paternity, to form various political alliances, and to produce male heirs to ensure “legitimate” lineages. I also do not wish to imply that wives are not criticized at all, since many women have been mocked as “gold diggers” or “trophy wives,” which reinscribe the commodification present in marital narratives. Marriages take on many forms. Further, marital narratives have shifted in the wake of legalizing miscegenation and more recently LGBT marriage equality legislation. Many argue that resisting marriage equality along various intersections (e.g. race, sexuality) was not just a moral or religious argument as many articulated, but was a salient way to control distributions of wealth and legal protections.

²⁹²*Paris is Burning*, DVD, directed by Jennie Livingston (USA: Dangerous, 1990).

time they don't. I feel like, if you're married? A woman, in the suburbs, a regular woman, if you want your husband to buy a washer and dryer set, I'm sure she'd have to go to bed with him, to give him something he wants, to get what she wants. So, in the long run, it all ends up the same way.

Her explanation regarding the commodification of sexuality and women's routine financial dependence on men is refreshing because it destabilizes the legitimate/illegitimate sex binary, which at times uncritically idealizes marriage.²⁹³

George-Warren agrees that Gentry's sex appeal became both a "blessing and a curse in her attempts to establish herself as a serious artist" and that her on-air appearances relegated her to "dancing around in tight-fitting pantsuits and minis."²⁹⁴ More specifically, unlike her costuming when performing "Ode to Billie Joe," Gentry performed "Fancy" on *The Johnny Cash Show* wearing a tight red jump suit. This outfit overshadowed the powerful, subversive concepts proposed in her songs. Audiences' interpretations of Gentry's aesthetic, while polysemic, expose how a rhetor's perceived ethos informs the lens through which audiences interpret rhetorical messages. It also reveals how Gentry, when not making record companies millions of dollars in sales, was excluded for being an outsider – regionally, sexually, and politically.

Jamieson argues that women who insisted on speaking in public have been discouraged through similar rhetorical tactics that are still relevant today. For example, female orators were and are verbally abused – often called whores, Jezebels, heresiarchs, witches, lesbians, men,

²⁹³ However, it is necessary to report that by the time the filming of the documentary ended, Venus Xtravaganza was murdered by an "escort," revealing the high-risk and tragic consequences of sex work. As a trans woman, she was at particular risk, statistically. Thus, one can understand why sex work is feared and vilified; however, critics should interrogate if this anger manifests through victim-blaming, rather than holding the "john" accountable. As of this writing, her murder is still unsolved.

²⁹⁴ George-Warren, 129.

hysterics, and effeminates.²⁹⁵ It is important to note that these instances of abuse are exacerbated and possibly ameliorated by identity intersections such as race, class, religion, region, status, citizenship status etc. Olson notes that “exclusion can be understood as an act of silencing.”²⁹⁶ Silencing mechanisms are of particular significant in the country music industry that often chooses profits over principle. Gentry was initially rejected by the country music industry in an attempt to silence her as a transgressive “pop” or “blues” outsider. Yet upon the commercial success of “Ode to Billie Joe,” the country industry came to “reclaim” her and award her one of the Academy of Country Music’s top honors. Further, she was rejected as an outsider by fellow feminists who either misunderstood her voice and silences, or sought to accrue and protect what privileges they could access at her expense.

²⁹⁵ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (New York, NY: Oxford, 1995), 84-93.

²⁹⁶ Lester C. Olson, “On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 50.

3.6 GENTRY PACKS UP AND CHECKS OUT

Before sending Fancy away to “charm” gentlemen, her dying mother handed Fancy “a heart-shaped locket that said / ‘To thine own self be true.’” Reliant on literary allusion and noteworthy metaphor, “Fancy” points to the necessary markings of women’s survival. “To thine own self be true” is a well-known line from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. They are the departing words by Polonius to his son, Laertes:

This above all: to thine own self be true
And it must follow, as the night as the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man
Farewell, my blessing season this in thee!²⁹⁷

This line is particularly significant because *Hamlet*, like most of Shakespeare’s plays, is a story that centers men’s experiences. It also highlights the tragic shortcomings of violent revenge and patrilineal anxieties about entitlements to power. By contrast, in “Fancy” and “Ode to Billie Joe,” daughters and mothers are centrally featured as survivors. Fancy, upon reciting “To thine own self be true,” “shivered as I watched a roach crawl across the toe of my high-heeled shoe.” While seemingly an innocuous detail that points to Fancy’s poor living condition, I interpret the roach as a metaphor for survival. Being able to withstand ages that claimed most other life forms, cockroaches seem to survive and thrive regardless of circumstance. Enduring pop music icon Madonna has even said, “I am a survivor. I am like a cockroach, you just can’t get rid of me.”

²⁹⁷ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet: Prince of Denmark* (1602): 218-221.

Even though her mother dies, Fancy endures because she made *herself* a “solemn vow,” which promotes choice, a chief principle of palatable liberal feminism. However, “Fancy” runs the risk of promoting neoliberal choice feminism, which negates the role of double binds that punish women’s choices and reinscribe the bootstrap myth.²⁹⁸ What these closing lines also reveal is Gentry’s artistic evolution that arguably reflects the growth and influence of second wave feminism. She started her career in 1967 writing with strategic silences about a voiceless grief-stricken girl in “Ode to Billie Joe.” This girl represented the legions of poor rural women and girls who were and are routinely silenced by legal, religious, and social mechanisms. Further, Gentry touched on the debilitating isolation fostered by rural stoicism. As her career climaxed, Gentry wrote about a multidimensional female agent named “Fancy,” determined to survive despite terrible circumstances in an era when sex workers were criminalized and often dismissed as irredeemable.²⁹⁹

Gentry’s rich and textured lyrics have an enduring quality, but it is her strategic silences that make her work remarkable. Communication and feminist rhetorical scholars routinely valorize voice as a tool for social and political change. However, I argue that there are circumstances in which silence, intimation, and indirection can be eloquent, powerful calls to

²⁹⁸ The bootstrap myth or myth of bootstrapping is a critique of the common idiom “pull yourself up by the bootstraps,” which informs the narrative of the American dream. This approach, however, often overlooks or negates the systematic (dis)advantages that influence one’s access to resources and opportunity. It also assumes that one fails, they simply did not work hard enough. It also overlooks the evolving class structure in the US promoting a retrospective nostalgia for class mobility. See Noliwe M. Rooks, “The Myth of Bootstrapping” *Time*, September 7, 2010, accessed November 14, 2016, <http://ideas.time.com/2012/09/07/the-myth-of-bootstrapping/> For a discussion of choice feminism and its appeal, please see Michael L. Ferguson, “Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics” *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (2010) 247-253. For a discussion on depoliticized feminism, mothering ambivalence, and the contemporary double binds associated with celebrating, commodifying, and moralizing girl’s and women’s sexuality, see Susan Douglas, *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism: How Pop Culture Took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2010).

²⁹⁹ While the “redeemable” sex worker narrative, also known as the “hooker with a heart of gold” trope, exists in popular culture, Gentry’s “Fancy” was unique in its familial, female-centric narrative and its medium of country music. Reba McEntire’s 1990 version of “Fancy” was hugely popular and has been revered as an empowering anthem for women, thus one could argue that the character of Fancy is now regarded as a feminist figure.

action. By tracing Gentry's strategic silences as "transforming silence into language and action," I have argued that her silences produced robust and successful discourse that, while controversial, got people talking about women's and feminist issues. Through my analysis, I aim to spark future conversations and research that explores the overlooked potential of strategic silences.

Furthermore, Gentry let "her lyrics do the talking" even when they were cryptic, misunderstood and complicated by her sexualized persona. Audre Lorde, in her tremendous 1978 speech "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," advised that

I have come to believe over and over that what is most important to me must be spoken made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect.³⁰⁰

Regardless of her lyrical poetry being bruised by audiences and industry gatekeepers, Gentry's music has incited an enduring legacy that is still appreciated today. While audiences do not know where Gentry resides or what she has been doing, they have also ignored some clues from her strategic silences. Gentry's last song on her final album *Patchwork* (1971) is a song called "Lookin' In." She details her exhaustion and her inability to settle down. She sings "I spend my nights in the bright spotlights / wishing I could let the people know / You can't win or lose unless you play the game." One way to reject the binary of winning or losing by playing the game is to reject the game altogether and to affirm the value of living simply outside of it. Also, Gentry had experienced great commercial success and attained the financial stability to be "rich

³⁰⁰ Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language into Action," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: Crossings, 1984), 40.

and idle,” allowing her to abscond from the bright spotlights of the stage. Gentry insists that the “ugliest word” she ever heard is “sacrifice” and that “I don’t want to meet myself at the masquerade,” and confirm that she does not recognize who she presumably has become. She is “Needing time to rest my mind...I’m packing up and checking out.” To me, Gentry is signaling her departure from show business; she is now “lookin’ in” from the outside of “the game.” Perhaps fans and industry insiders are so perplexed and mesmerized by her ongoing “self-imposed exile” because most celebrity figures are readily accessible to fans and do not always willingly relinquish the spotlight, as Gentry has. Like Patsy Cline, who died at age thirty, Gentry disappeared from the public eye at the age of thirty-four allowing audiences to engage in and play with her “posthumous” career. Despite being alive and well, Gentry has sustained complete privacy and anonymity for forty years, solidifying her now mythic legacy. But then again, Bobbie Gentry has always been good at keeping secrets.

4.0 CHAPTER 4: DOLLY PARTON

4.1 OPEN INVITATION: DOLLY PARTON'S NEGOTIATIONS OF CAMP

Often dismissed as simple, lowbrow and tangled in rural roots, country music has been overlooked by critical scholars as a site of camp – full of artifice and gendered exaggeration. Christopher Isherwood's pioneering articulation of camp, and its low and high demarcations, opened audiences to celebrate its impactful cultural role.³⁰¹ Ten years later, Susan Sontag's important "Notes on 'Camp'" invited audiences to celebrate camp, but also engage it academically, while only briefly referencing its important role in gay men's communities.³⁰² However, camp's significance as a transgressive and theatrical performance germinating from gay communities has spurred some controversy. Several academics are critical of this assumed relationship and argue that gay white men are attempting to "own" camp to the exclusion of others – particularly women and gay men of color. This contentious discourse limits camp's utility as a valuable form of expression. Further, many critics who claim camp is a form of appropriation run the risk of fueling animosity leading to territorializing, which can foment

³⁰¹ Christopher Isherwood, *The World in the Evening* (London: Methuen, 1954).

³⁰² Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" *Partisan Review* 31 (1964): 515-30.

retreat responses.³⁰³ Therefore, I aim to point out camp's potential as a rhetorical strategy of "invitational rhetoric" that can build alliances, rather than divisions.

Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin contend that traditional rhetorical theories, or approaches to persuasion, reflect a patriarchal bias that disadvantages those outside of traditional oratorical forms – such as women, people of color, and queer communities. Sally Miller Gearhart even argues that "any intent to persuade is an act of violence," signaling how persuasion purports an ideology of domination rather than invitation.³⁰⁴ Many feminist rhetorical scholars argue that embedded in efforts to persuade are narratives of control, domination, and the desire to change someone. The impetus to control is specifically salient to marginalized groups who have been figuratively and literally controlled by the outcomes of oppressive persuasive narratives and legal structures (e.g., anti-choice legislation, criminalization of homosexuality, and racist disciplinary mechanisms etc.). Thus, those who are rendered outside the patriarchal "paternalistic" standpoint of the rhetor are thought to be naïve, uninformed, and in need of enlightenment "simply because [their perspective] is different from the rhetor's own."³⁰⁵ These paternalistic standpoints may promote condescending, colonizing, and potentially violent rhetoric and are still deeply relevant today as policy makers and leaders ignore the perspectives of those who will be affected by rollbacks in rights and freedoms – women, people of color, and queer communities.

Therefore, Foss and Griffin propose the alternative of "invitational rhetoric," which invites understanding and "expands the scope of rhetorical theory and enhances the discipline's

³⁰³ Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991), 17, 19, 22.

³⁰⁴ Sally Miller Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 241.

³⁰⁵ Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995), 6.

ability to explain diverse communicative phenomena successfully.”³⁰⁶ Employing feminist theory, Foss and Griffin argue that invitational rhetoric relies on three basic principles: equality, immanent value, and self-determination. First, equality assumes a reciprocity in discourse and a goal of mutual understanding, which discourages elitism, domination, and a need to change someone. Second, immanent value highlights how living beings embody an immanent value rather than a proven worth derived from arbitrary markers of prestige. Third, self-determination is a principle grounded in respect for others to make their own decisions. In line with these three principles, I argue that Dolly Parton’s enactment of camp is an apt example of invitational rhetoric. Her employment of camp as a rhetorical strategy allows her to sustain a mass fan base of disparate audiences by building meaningful alliances. Specifically, in this chapter, I explore how Dolly Parton employs three strategic negotiations of camp in order to contribute to underexplored areas in rhetorical scholarship.

First, I offer a brief background on camp, its definitions and uses. Then, I highlight some of the academic controversies that have thwarted camp alliances. Next, I note the way binaries limit women’s potential as public figures who must negotiate sexist binds that render women (and marginalized groups) as pejoratively “too much.” Thirdly, by heavily relying on Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp,’” I explain how Parton successfully negotiates three camp binaries: authenticity/artifice, hypersexuality/monogamy and monstrous/virtuous. In conclusion, I point out the utility of Parton’s camp as an example of invitational rhetoric that has the potential to promote salient alliances among scholars and oppressed groups.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 2.

4.2 CAMP IS TERRIBLY HARD TO DEFINE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The performance of camp is thought to stem from the French *se camper*, which means to posture or flaunt.³⁰⁷ However, camp in its modern iterations takes on many nuanced definitions. Isherwood's brief but powerful discussion of camp distinguished between high and low forms, which highlights its diverse potential. Jodie Taylor notes that Isherwood's articulation of camp spurred a continuing trend that highlights its multiple "operative modes" from the playfulness of a "swishy little boy with peroxidized hair" to the seriousness of high camp "typified by the ballet and baroque art."³⁰⁸ Camp, like the contemporary term "queer," takes on numerous linguistic functions that allow for a variety of interpretations. This variety has posed some difficulty to scholars who seek to definitively define camp.

As Isherwood's novel reveals, camp "is terribly hard to define."³⁰⁹ Inspired by Isherwood, the often cited Susan Sontag's "Notes on 'Camp,'" "launched camp into the mainstream."³¹⁰ However, Sontag does not give gay men unequivocal credit as producers of

³⁰⁷ Jodie Taylor, *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-Making*, (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2012), 67.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 69. Isherwood, *The World in the Evening*, 110-1.

³⁰⁹ Christopher Isherwood, 111.

³¹⁰ Jodie Taylor, *Playing it Queer*, 70.

camp, writing that “if homosexuals hadn’t more or less invented Camp, someone else would.”³¹¹ Several critics disagree with Sontag. For example, Richard Dyer points out that camp is the “only style, language and culture that is distinctively and unambiguously gay male. In a world drenched in straightness...Camp is the one thing that expresses and confirms being a gay man.”³¹² Further, Jack Babuscio posits that camp began as a response to the homophobic natural/unnatural framing of hetero/homosexuality, which negated gay men’s humanity. Thus, camp became reliant on promoting irony through “highly incongruous contrast” that destabilizes strict binaries. The most common of these contrasts, he asserts, is the limiting binary of the masculine/feminine.³¹³

Kenneth Burke argues that rhetoric often “proves opposites” and this divisive framing undergirds what Foss and Griffin critique as a patriarchal rhetoric of domination.³¹⁴ Dyer and Babuscio challenge these binaries, which are often mislabeled as “natural” and oppositional to reinstate hierarchies. Burkean scholar Elizabeth Weiser argues that those who participate in dichotomous arguments become “deadlocked in inaction.”³¹⁵ Thus, these supposed “natural” binaries, I argue, have led to unnecessary clashes in scholarly discourse about camp: who “owns” it, who can use it, and who benefits from it, which reinstates “patriarchal bias.”³¹⁶ Further, seeing rhetoric and persuasion as a battlefield between two oppositional binaries, who seek to change

³¹¹ Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (New York: Octagon, 1982), 291.

³¹² Richard Dyer, “It’s Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject – A Reader*, ed., Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 110.

³¹³ Jack Babuscio, “The Cinema of Camp (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility),” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject – A Reader*, ed., Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 120.

³¹⁴ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1950), 25. However, it is important to note that not all of Burke’s perspectives explain or champion a rhetoric of domination. For example, see his strategy of “perspective by incongruity.” Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1935, 1984), 90. M. Elizabeth Weiser, “As Usual I Fell on the Bias”: Kenneth Burke’s Situated Dialectic,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 42 (2009), 134-53.

³¹⁵ Weiser, 150.

³¹⁶ Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric” *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 1.

the other, is problematic for discussions about camp, which often advocates tenderness and admiration. In effect, binaries function in line with traditional patriarchal models of persuasion that disadvantage many.

Binaries have historically been unkind to marginalized bodies, especially women. Cartesian dualism reaffirms women as mere bodies (objects) and men as enlightened intellectuals (subjects). Kathleen Hall Jamieson's work on double binds exposes how femininity is framed as often incompatible with markers of competency and prestige. Celeste Condit argues that women's opportunities to participate in public discourse are "rotted by men's vision of female perfection."³¹⁷ In effect, women – who are presumably read as feminine – are offered false choices (i.e. to be more feminine and seemingly incompetent, or more masculine and threatening) that routinely theorize them as inferior since they are held to impossible standards. Consequently, women are "damned if they do, and damned if they don't."³¹⁸ Moreover, strict gender binaries are debilitating, and camp has the potential to subvert them.

Camp is a powerful tool because of its ability to challenge and destabilize these stigmatized standpoints and turn "the feminine" into a laudable marker of theatrical subversion through "[b]eing-as-playing-a-role;" however, controversies over camp's shortcomings persist.³¹⁹ Carole-Anne Tyler argues that "the feminine" is rejected in some facets of gay culture, reinscribing gender hierarchy. She posits that much of homophobia stems from a fear that "homosexuality robs a man of his virility and feminizes him," which "conjoins homophobia and misogyny" and manifests in the "rejection of the effeminate invert, who is contrasted with the

³¹⁷ Celeste Condit, "Post-Burke: Transcending the sub-stance of dramatism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 78 (1992), 349-55.

³¹⁸ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 4.

³¹⁹ Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" 4.

‘real thing,’ the gay-identified masculine man.”³²⁰ This framing of yet another binary of invert/virility is informed by traditional patriarchal bias and points to some of the controversies that condemn camp, and expressive gender theatrics, as inherently misogynistic as well as appropriative.

Camp is a cultural sensibility created by predominantly white, gay identifying men as a source of empowerment and agency; however, it is seen by some as appropriative of women, who are erased as producers of camp.³²¹ As Pamela Robertson articulates, the divisions between gay and feminist theory can disallow alliances, promulgating an overemphasis on divergence that leads to contestation over the “ownership” of camp.³²² Further, Robertson claims that “the only authentic form of camp is gay and generally misogynist,” which foments horizontal hostility in which oppressed gay men may rely on male privilege in order to distance themselves from other oppressed demographics, such as women and other gay men.³²³

Problematic rhetorics of domination are also evident in narratives of intragroup tensions among gay men that promote patriarchal territorializing. David Halperin explores the competition among the oppositional yet complementary figures of the “camp” (femme, queen) and the “beauty” (masculine, idealized body).³²⁴ This polarization explains the often strict

³²⁰ Carole-Anne Tyler, “Boys Will Be Girls: Drag and Transvestic Fetishism,” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performance Subject – A Reader*, ed., Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 372.

³²¹ It is necessary to point out that while camp and drag may be seen as “appropriative” by some critics, many could argue it is done in celebration and admiration of women like Dolly Parton who has a widespread loyal base of LGBTQ+ fans. Specifically, many adore her because she has struggled to be herself despite disciplinary mechanisms enacted by the country music industry, church, and her family, that tried to change her. Further, she has been an outspoken advocate in solidarity with her fans. She routinely employs humor and tenderness to share why she supports her fans, rather than why her other anti-equality fans are wrong. In effect, she is admired as a feminine icon; camp and drag performers dress and act like her out of celebration not mockery.

³²² Pamela Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 8-9.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 57.

³²⁴ David Halperin, “The Beauty and the Camp,” in his *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

binaries in camp theory and practice that limit its potential to supposed outsiders. Moe Meyer contends that “the unqueer do not have access to the discourse of Camp, only to derivatives constructed through the act of appropriation.”³²⁵ However Meyer’s territorializing of camp, and barring the unqueer from it, emboldens critics to question if gay men have appropriated some camp sensibilities and inspirations from women – who are often overlooked as sources and subjects of camp.

Robertson claims that women, both lesbian and straight, have been excluded from discussions of camp due to limited access to the image and culture-making processes of society.³²⁶ Yet, women historically have been producers of camp, perhaps unknowingly. Hollywood icon Mae West famously quipped that camp is the “kinda comedy that imitates me” illuminating (assumedly white) women’s position as the objects (muses), not subjects (creators), of camp. In order to destabilize the racial, class, and sexual assumptions about camp’s cultural role, Uri McMillan asks “why should camp belong solely to white gay men?”³²⁷ McMillan points out that camp is largely recognized as white, because of the framing of its history, which promotes a narrative of “ownership.” Additionally, camp often assumes and upholds whiteness.

Robertson adds that discourse about camp never interrogates whiteness until people of color, particularly black people, become visible.³²⁸ As Altman put it, “camp is to gay what soul is to black;” however, some have seen this comparison as reductionist. Historically, when oppressions are conflated, animosity can percolate between oppressed groups who point to the

³²⁵ Moe Meyer, *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

³²⁶ Pamela Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 8-9.

³²⁷ Uri McMillan, “Nicki-aesthetics: The Camp Performance of Nicki Minaj.” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24 (2014): 81.

³²⁸ Pamela Robertson, “Mae West’s Maids: Race ‘Authenticity’ and the Discourse of Camp,” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed., Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 394.

importance of intersectionality, nuance and difference.³²⁹ For example, following the Stonewall Riots, *Gay* magazine was lambasted by self-defined “real” black men who resisted the conflation of racism with the homophobia experienced by “spoiled white sissies.”³³⁰ What this problematic “patriarchal bias” reveals along the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality is that gay black men do not also experience homophobia, partake in camp, nor are they assumed to exist. This exchange reveals a lack of intersectionality and that oppressed groups may participate in debilitating horizontal hostility rather than solidarity. Whiteness, as a hegemonic standard in camp, thus creates a negative difference – identification only by what one is *not*, allowing whiteness to go undetected as a tacit norm in straight and queer communities.

This essay does not attend explicitly to discussions of blackness and hypervisibility, for example, but by referencing McMillan, Robertson, and Altman, I aim to point out how camp scholarship may elide the role of queer men of color – and signal to an area of future intersectional scholarship. Thus, it is assumed by critics that gay white men are an “improvised self-elected class” who have created a space of pride and theatrical expression in isolation, away from the influence of people of color or women.³³¹ However, in doing so white gay men have been criticized for conflating oppressions and alienating others who experience oppressions, which creates a challenging bind. Rather, camp is a rhetorical strategy of self-representation that could promote invitations to engage groups who have been alienated from camp discourse. One area that is underexplored—academic and otherwise—is the engagement with low camp

³²⁹ Some contemporary examples that come to mind: white feminists and WOC feminists, unemployed “Millennials” and unemployed industrial workers, Anti-pornography feminists and Sex workers, Stay at home mothers and working mothers.

³³⁰ Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 204-5.

³³¹ Sontag, 12.

produced by disenfranchised (e.g., poor, rural) white women as well as the robust camp medium of country music.

The accusations of racist alienation and the misogynist “one way traffic,”³³² between gay men’s appropriation of women’s cultural contributions, have the capacity to bolster patriarchal rhetorics of domination, which must be challenged. These rhetorics limit camp’s potential as a reading/viewing process with the ability to foment community, destabilize false binaries, and create a space to queer archaic and unproductive arguments about the origins and ownership of camp. Therefore, I look to an alternative form of rhetoric—invitational rhetoric—to articulate how camp, rather than a site of derision and misogyny, is an invitation to stimulate understanding, celebrate gender play, and share in tenderness.

In *Mother Camp*, an ethnography of drag queens, Esther Newton highlights that camp becomes a strategy for identity formation to resolve self-contempt by reclaiming a sense of pride in historically denigrated identities.³³³ Farmer adds that camp is “underwritten by a fantasmatic logic of gender ambivalence and sexual transgression,” which works to destabilize stifling gender binaries that restrict and discipline gender expression.³³⁴ While camp is associated with a form of gay spectatorship that privileges feminine excess, Taylor points out that camp is a performative *critique* of social normativities, which queers all gender constraints well beyond gay men.³³⁵ Farmer clarifies that “[I]t is not my intention, however, to claim an essential link between camp and gay subjectivities. Many non-gay-identifying subjects can and frequently do

³³² Pamela Robertson, *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

³³³ Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

³³⁴ Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passion: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 112.

³³⁵ Taylor, 67.

engage/express camp tastes; conversely, many gay men do not.”³³⁶ Instead, camp possesses a “vacant” nature, as an open form of expression not bound to a particular demographic.³³⁷ Furthermore, camp can be understood as an expressive form of invitational rhetoric rooted in freedom and choice, not in mockery, control, or divisions. To express the rhetorical potential of camp as a strategy to form alliances, I use Susan Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp’” as the primary lens through which to explore country music star Dolly Parton’s negotiations of the otherwise limiting camp binaries of artifice/authenticity, hypersexuality/monogamy, and monstrous/virtuous in order to demonstrate how her invitational rhetoric sustains a mass fan base of disparate audiences, forms alliances, and contributes to underexplored areas in camp scholarship.

4.3 AUTHENTICITY / ARTIFICE

Dolly Parton maintains that “it costs a lot of money to look this cheap” exposing her fondness for a hyperbolic, “low camp” persona that has helped make her famous. Sontag, in her discussion of low camp and camp taste, only hints at camp’s relationship to class, even though many could argue that class, taste, and identity performance are deeply intertwined. Sontag notes

³³⁶ Farmer, 112.

³³⁷ See Andrew Britton, *Katherine Hepburn: Star as Feminist* (London: Studio Vista, 1995), 40. For an overview of camp performance and camp taste in nongay contexts, see Andrew Ross, “Uses of Camp,” *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 106.

that authenticity is aristocratic (high camp) and that artifice, on the other hand, is merely the cultivation of a snob taste even if one does not have the resources to replicate aristocratic taste.³³⁸ Therefore, one's taste is not inherent or natural. Pierre Bourdieu argues that taste is an "acquired disposition" used to mark differences through a process of distinction. It is not "a gift of nature" but the constructed effects of systems of social organization.³³⁹ One's standpoint informs taste based on networks of history, culture, and society. Thus "taste functions as an important means for the production and legitimation of social distinction."³⁴⁰ Taste can offer nuance to a social position and also provide an opportunity to ascend or reveal economic class.

Parton's camp taste is particularly salient in relation to her impoverished upbringing. The fourth of twelve children raised in Tennessee's Smoky Mountains, Parton writes that "the quest for beauty has always been a struggle for me."³⁴¹ Halperin notes that "beauty is aristocratic, not democratic;" therefore, Parton's reluctance to define herself as a *natural* beauty illuminates how class and access to resources can shape one's perceptions of beauty and its cachet.³⁴² Sontag adds that camp "is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization," exposing why Parton's beauty has relied on a celebration of campy artifice in pursuit of an outlet from the stigma of poverty.³⁴³

In a 1984 interview with Andy Warhol and Maura Moynihan, Parton explains her lust for wealth and its image: "I was impressed with kings and queens and velvet and jewelry when I was

³³⁸ Sontag, 12.

³³⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 466.

³⁴⁰ Farmer, 111.

³⁴¹ Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 61.

³⁴² Halperin, 207.

³⁴³ Sontag, 2.

young,” which led to her having “the biggest hair in school.”³⁴⁴ Babuscio writes that camp allows for the art of “passing,” specifically in regards to sexuality. He posits that “to pass is to be ‘on stage,’ to impersonate heterosexual citizenry, to pretend to be a ‘real’ (i.e. straight) man or woman.”³⁴⁵ While Babuscio speaks specifically of passing as “straight” in line with dominant heterosexist ideologies, I argue that Parton employs camp in somewhat of a parallel way – as a chance to “pass” as a woman of upward mobility and opulence despite her “closeted” abject poverty. So Parton, like gay men, has a “heightened awareness and appreciation for disguise, impersonation, the projection of personality” as expression and escapism.³⁴⁶

However, Parton admits that even now with her substantial fortune and escape from rural poverty, she still spends “a lot of money on cheap clothes.”³⁴⁷ In her critical exploration of Parton’s autobiography, Pamela Fox argues that Parton pays tribute to her “poor taste – continuing the legacy of her low class roots – and celebrating her escape from the material deprivation that frequently accompanies it”³⁴⁸ as a “tool in subaltern identity formation.”³⁴⁹

Parton traces her pursuit of artifice back to her relationship with media. Entranced by “brightly painted” women in magazines and catalogues, Parton writes in her autobiography that

They didn’t look at all like they had to work in the fields. They didn’t look like they had to take a spit bath in a dishpan. They didn’t look as if men and boys could just put their hands on them any time they felt like it.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁴ Maura Moynihan and Andy Warhol, “New Again: Dolly Parton,” *Interview* (1984), 1.

³⁴⁵ Jack Babuscio, “Camp and the Gay Sensibility,” in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* ed., David Bergman (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts), 25.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁴⁷ Moynihan and Warhol, 1.

³⁴⁸ Pamela Fox, “Recycled ‘Trash’: Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography,” *American Quarterly* 50, (1998), 258.

³⁴⁹ McMillan, 81.

³⁵⁰ Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 59.

Here, Parton expresses her desire to mimic unattainable, wealthy, feminine attributes in order to escape everyday predicaments of agrarian labor, poverty, and sexism, while maintaining a look that she enjoys. Parton explains that as a girl she used burnt matchsticks to darken her eyebrows and lashes, Mercurochrome to stain her lips, and “the juice of pokeberries for rouge.”³⁵¹ She also acknowledges that “when teasing [hair] came out [as fashionable] I just thought I had died and gone to heaven,” which illuminates the pleasure she experiences by constructing her unnatural, camp aesthetic.³⁵²

Sontag notes that “Nothing in nature can be campy;”³⁵³ therefore, Parton’s escape from a rural location and its “exhausted, plain farm women” was a salient step toward cultivating her now legendary campy artifice.³⁵⁴ Parton remembers her drive during adolescence to “cling desperately to anything halfway feminine” as not only a way to express herself, but imagine a life elsewhere.³⁵⁵ Parton links her exaggerated aesthetic to the limitations of her natural body, explaining that “I have little short hands so I like long nails, and I’m short so I like high heels. I never could get my hair to do what I wanted it to do, so I started wearing the wigs. It all came from a very serious place.”³⁵⁶ Isherwood, in his novel *The World in the Evening*, writes that “[y]ou can’t camp about something you don’t take seriously. You’re not making fun of it; you’re making fun out of it,” pointing to camp as a strategy of joyful expression.³⁵⁷ Further, Sontag explains that “Camp taste effaces nature, or else contradicts it outright,”³⁵⁸ because to be natural

³⁵¹ Ibid., 61.

³⁵² Ibid., 59-60.

³⁵³ Sontag, 3.

³⁵⁴ Parton, *Dolly*, 60.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 58.

³⁵⁶ Moynihan and Warhol, 1.

³⁵⁷ Isherwood, 110.

³⁵⁸ Sontag, 4.

is “such a very difficult pose to keep up.”³⁵⁹ Parton explains how seriously she crafted her aesthetic and persona, echoing Sontag’s and Isherwood’s argument that camp expressions “are dead serious.”³⁶⁰

Isherwood writes that camp allows one to express “what’s basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance,” which reflects Parton’s own sentiment.³⁶¹ Parton shared that her camp persona is a “double-edged sword, and I have to overcome myself a lot.” Parton reveals that perhaps her own form of expression of “fun and artifice and elegance” is incongruous with fans’ expectations. However, she derives great pleasure from her persona, which spurs her serious pursuit of her personal kind of glamour. She continues

I think people see me more as tits and hair and personality. Truly. Except those that really do follow me closely, that can see beneath the hair to know that there’s a brain, and beneath the boobs to know that there’s a heart...there’s hopefully some talent...I’ve created this. I’ve played it up and enjoyed it—the makeup, the whole person. I’ve overexaggerated and made things worse, and hope they ought to fit. But I’ve had a good time doing it, and it all came from a serious place: a country girl’s idea of what glamour is.³⁶²

Regardless of those who may misunderstand her as a cartoonish “dumb blonde” for example, she takes solace in knowing that those who take the time to follow her, will see her extraordinary talent.³⁶³ Isherwood writes that to understand camp, “you have to meditate on it and feel it intuitively.”³⁶⁴ Thus, Parton’s camp persona is a joyful self-expression of manicured artifice that,

³⁵⁹ Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband* (London, England: Dover Publications, 1985), 6.

³⁶⁰ Sontag, 6.

³⁶¹ Isherwood, 110.

³⁶² Bill Friskies-Warren, “Deeper Blue: Dolly Parton Reflects on Bluegrass Music, Her Public Image, and Her Proudest Achievement: Her Art,” *Nashville Scene* (2001): 3.

³⁶³ One of my favorite Parton quips is: “I know I’m not a dumb blonde! Because I know I’m not dumb, and I know I’m not blonde.”

³⁶⁴ Isherwood, 111.

despite its potential drawbacks, is worth it to her because it is how she feels. Her *authentic* artifice is not worth sacrificing; she cannot be closeted.

Parton's serious camp persona embodies a caricature of femininity with surgically altered body parts, fashion to compensate for her natural frame, and no children, which challenges the often restrictive markers of "natural" womanhood. As a woman, Parton partakes in a "deliberate and ironic female masquerade" to cultivate a persona that is read as camp.³⁶⁵ Halperin (2012) argues that glamorous women are simply "cartoon women – who express only parts of women, aspects of femininity exaggerated to an outlandish degree – because femininity always has something performative and artificial about it."³⁶⁶ Problematically, Halperin dismisses much of women's gender performance as calculating, incomplete, and inauthentic, and reifies femininity as inferior to masculinity.³⁶⁷ As ecofeminists suggest, women have historically been constructed as closer to nature; thus men, seen as tamers of nature, must dutifully control women. But through camp, I argue that women can play with the *unnatural* and thus challenge assumptions that limit women and uphold patriarchal domination. Camp, in effect, destabilizes the binary of nature (feminine) and culture (masculine), which allows women and gay men to gleefully "go *against* nature," in their gender expression and sexuality, rather than strengthen problematic binaries that routinely disadvantage the feminine.

Parton's songs, on the other hand, embrace nature allowing her to rely on the authenticity of her rural roots and adhere to themes of country music that have spanned her career. She writes

³⁶⁵ Pamela Robertson, "'The Kinda Comedy That Imitates Me': Mae West's Identification with the Feminist Camp," *Cinema Journal* 32 (1993), 60.

³⁶⁶ Halperin, 211.

³⁶⁷ Additionally, Halperin's argument does not account for cultural climates that disallow women from expressing themselves wholly without public derision. By singling out "glamorous" women, Halperin seems to point to unglamorous women as more authentic; however, this reifies the femininity/competence double bind that often thwarts women's ability to be taken seriously in any context.

that “I have never ceased to be amazed by nature. Anybody who spends any time at all observing nature has to believe there is a God.”³⁶⁸ For example, Parton’s 1973 hit album *My Tennessee Mountain Home* pays homage to her impoverished upbringing and the rural landscape. Forty-three years later, her 2016 tour is entitled “Pure and Simple,” exposing her longstanding tradition of celebrating the natural, unadulterated, and authentic. But as evidenced in her 2016 tour, the contrast between Parton’s nature and culture is visually salient. She plays several instruments found in traditional Appalachian folk music such as an acoustic guitar, fiddle, and dulcimer, but in line with her hyperbolic feminine aesthetic, the instruments are all fully encrusted with sparkling rhinestones.³⁶⁹ Her music and persona can remain grounded despite the flashy artifice because her audience knows the root of it is still “authentic.”

Sontag asserts that “Camp rests on innocence” and “the relation of Camp taste to the past is extremely sentimental,”³⁷⁰ which aligns with many fans’ affinity for country music that “presumes humble origins, anti-intellectualism, and literature naiveté.”³⁷¹ Fox highlights that country music discourse “has been nostalgically represented as the ‘natural’ – [detailing] unspoiled rural life, farming, and folk wisdom.”³⁷² Sheila Simon explores how the deeply sentimental themes in country music are revisionist in order to comfort those destabilized by the looming change of the present. She posits that when faced with problems, characters in country music songs often look backward, “pining for some kind of tradition” to fix it – even if that

³⁶⁸ Parton, *Dolly*, 21.

³⁶⁹ Hannah Lynn, Notes of Dolly Parton’s “Pure and Simple” Live Performance (Pittsburgh, PA: Consol Energy Center, Jun. 28, 2016), 1.

³⁷⁰ Sontag, 6, 4.

³⁷¹ Pamela Fox, “Recycled ‘Trash’: Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography,” *American Quarterly* 50, (1998), 238.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 245.

romanticized tradition never existed.³⁷³ Therefore, country music has a unique cultural quality akin to camp, in which sentimental framing of the past “arouses a necessary sympathy” that is simultaneously natural *and* constructed.³⁷⁴

Parton’s 1969 song “In the Good Old Days (When Times Were Bad)” exposes her personal ambivalence toward nostalgia. While she is cognizant of the appealing revisionist rhetoric of the “good old days,” she is honest in her gratefulness of the present because “it’s amazing how healing money can be.”³⁷⁵ Having penned over 5,000 songs and developed savvy business ventures, no one could dispute Parton’s abilities as an artist, brand, and entrepreneur. While her camp persona relies on low camp artifice, her impoverished background, musical prowess, and business acumen provide high camp authenticity. Thus, she negotiates style *and* content.

³⁷³ Sheila Simon, “Greatest Hits: Domestic Violence in American Country Music.” *Oregon Law Review* 82 (2004), 1114.

³⁷⁴ Sontag, 8.

³⁷⁵ Parton, *Dolly*, 39.

4.4 HYPERSEXUALITY / MONOGAMY

Parton's second negotiation of camp is between her flirtatious availability and her intangible sexuality. Camp is intertwined with sexuality according to many camp scholars such as Halperin. He argues that once one "has" or sleeps with a beauty, the beauty becomes camp, merely a sister, who is no longer sexually enticing.³⁷⁶ Similar logic pervades narratives of dating in which some lovers are only interested in the somewhat predatory "chase," but once the sexual encounter occurs, parties lose interest. Therefore, it is salient that Dolly Parton is hypersexualized in her persona and flirtatious with her fans, yet is never truly available to anyone due to her presumably monogamous marriage of over fifty years to Carl Dean. During the June 28 Pittsburgh show of her 2016 "Pure and Simple" tour, Parton told the audience that she recently celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary by renewing her vows with Dean. Later, when a crew member brought her a new instrument, she said "Hello handsome! I said I was married; I didn't say I was blind!" Then, when an audience member audibly shouted "I love you!" she responded with "I love you too, but I told you to wait on the bus!" illuminating Parton's unique playful capacity to be both explicitly sexual, yet sexually inaccessible.³⁷⁷

Further, in a 1998 daytime interview with television host Rosie O'Donnell, Parton alludes to her unbridled sexuality through mischievous, unrefined humor. She held up a blanket with her

³⁷⁶ This pejorative framing of "sister" exposes how, upon feminization, a virile masculine man loses his sexual allure, reifying the feminine as, at best, a source of platonic friendship, and at worst, inferior and resented.

³⁷⁷ Lynn, 1.

huge embroidered face on it, and explained that it is a top seller among her fans. Parton exclaims that “For the right price, I sleep with anyone!” Parton’s humor aligns with Sontag’s argument that “Camp, appreciates vulgarity” and is intentionally “anti-serious.”³⁷⁸ Music journalist Jim Ridley notes that Parton’s “unusual, haunting voice registers everything from endearing vulnerability to good-natured vulgarity,” revealing her inviting dualities.³⁷⁹

Foss and Griffin note that “invention in invitational rhetoric allows for the development of interpretations, perspectives, courses of actions, and solutions” by creating an opportunity for the “audience to contribute to the generation of ideas.”³⁸⁰ Therefore, Parton says “[s]ometimes you just want to do something that makes [audiences] go, ‘Wow, who’d have thought to do that?’”³⁸¹ leading one “die-hard fan” Tess Gerhart to say “she’s constantly changing...she always keeps our attention—she makes us wonder what she’s going to do next.”³⁸² Parton’s interest in eliciting curiosity from her audience and her audience’s reciprocal wonderment aligns with the “principle of egalitarian reciprocity” of respect and mutual admiration.³⁸³ But Parton, at times, can be deeply serious and less playful. In a 1984 interview, Moynihan asks “Do you think the sexual revolution went too far?” and Parton states:

I’m just not going to say, because I cannot do that and not be a hypocrite. My fantasies carried me to where I wanted to go. My imagination is greater than the reality. I really get into whatever I get into, and I do it my own way.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁸ Sontag, 11, 10.

³⁷⁹ Jim Ridley, “Dolly Why We Love Her” *Nashville Scene* (1993), 18.

³⁸⁰ Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin. “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric” *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995), 16.

³⁸¹ Bill Friskies-Warren, “Deeper Blue: Dolly Parton Reflects on Bluegrass Music, Her Public Image, and Her Proudest Achievement: Her Art” *Nashville Scene* (2001): 1.

³⁸² Ridley, 18.

³⁸³ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 29.

³⁸⁴ Moynihan and Warhol, 1.

Parton's answer implies that she herself goes "too far" in her sexuality, making it inappropriate to pass judgment on others' "own way," which is a refreshingly queer perspective. By promoting "universal moral respect," Parton challenges heteronormative restraints that often stifle women's sexual desires.³⁸⁵

Yet Parton's often refreshing take on sexuality has routinely been the topic of gossip magazine headlines that name her countless lovers, which sustain her hypersexual persona. On Jay Leno's *Tonight Show* in 2003, Parton said that "I never met a man I didn't like." She later went on to move her trademark breasts for the audience to mimic male strippers, who flex their pectoral muscles onstage. Laughing and throwing her head forward, she shrieks "my husband is going to kick my ass!" demonstrating that there are limits to her public sexuality due to the existence of her largely invisible husband. Because of Parton's rhetorically significant "ghost husband," she is never read as "too much" or having gone "too far," but rather routinely awarded a "cloak of married respectability."³⁸⁶

Aging bachelors are often understood as independent or selective rather than suspicious. Meanwhile women are often pejoratively framed as failures if single after a certain age. Therefore, it has been in a woman's best interest to "find a husband" as means to attain self-worth, moral respectability, markers of public heterosexuality, safety, and financial resources, for example. Additionally, heterosexual marriage provides a legible "ethos of sexual normalcy" to which all other sexuality is compared.³⁸⁷ However, when securing a husband proves difficult, women have the option to employ the rhetorical strategy of a "ghost husband." A ghost husband,

³⁸⁵ Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 29.

³⁸⁶ Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 296.

³⁸⁷ Charles E. Morris III, "Pink Herring & the Fourth Persona," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 228-244.

as I articulate it, is a rhetorical figure who may or may not legitimately exist as a woman's husband. He is not visibly or financially present in his wife's public life; however, she publically speaks of him often, providing her a source of credibility. He is a moral marker of legitimacy in heterosexist patriarchal culture, but the wife is not "spoken for" – figuratively or literally.

Since most women in positions of public power are historically expected to be married to a man, a ghost husband affords a woman an autonomy often unavailable to single women who seek an influential public persona. Women who are not married can run the risk of being framed as promiscuous, suspicious (i.e., "Why aren't you married?"), easy prey, or even a "homewrecker." For example, Bobbie Gentry, the writer and singer of the 1967 smash hit "Ode to Billie Joe," was framed as a slinky, exotic beauty with a swampy voice that sounded "as if she recorded the song while sprawled across rumpled satin sheets."³⁸⁸ Gentry, however, was not married, which arguably led to her 1970 song "Fancy" being misinterpreted by "women's lib" feminists as glamorizing sex work. Gentry's aim, however, was to shed light on the desperate realities of women in rural poverty. Further, Gentry's colleague, Kelly Gordon, left his wife and children to pursue a relationship with Gentry, further stigmatizing her as both a promiscuous temptress and a danger to fellow women. In effect, Gentry's sex appeal became a "blessing and a curse in her attempts to establish herself as a serious artist."³⁸⁹ Parton, on the other hand, escapes these double binds by being sexy yet still unthreatening because of the safety and privilege provided by her marriage.

Sontag notes that "camp is a mode of seduction – one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity" exposing Parton's

³⁸⁸ Holly George-Warren, "Mystery girl: The Forgotten Artistry of Bobbie Gentry," in *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop Music*, ed., Eric Weisbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 123-7.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

ability to play with sexuality, innuendo, and the presence/absence of her “ghost husband.”³⁹⁰ The day after her 1964 high school graduation, Parton moved to Nashville. During her first day in this new setting, Parton met Carl Dean outside a laundrette. They married two years later and have been married ever since.³⁹¹ While a lengthy marriage is less common among those in show business, what makes Parton’s marriage so interesting and significant to studies of camp and feminist rhetoric is that Dean has only been seen publically with his wife four or five times. The most common photograph shown of the two is their wedding photo from 1966. The owner of a Nashville-area paving company, Dean has reportedly only seen his wife perform once. Parton noted in a 1977 television exclusive with Barbara Walters that, “I need freedom...the man gives me freedom,” revealing how Parton is legibly tethered to morality, yet is enticing, free, and sexual. When asked about the secret to a long marriage, she often quips, “I stay gone!” While the use of a “ghost husband” may seem unnecessary and even antiquated, I argue that this rhetorical strategy is relevant and useful for female camp figures who must navigate public space amidst sexist constraints and double standards, which often demand that all camp icons (queer and heterosexual) contain and restrict their assumed sexual excess.

The ghost husband allows for the wife to be respectably married and presumably monogamous, yet she is simultaneously unconfined by patriarchal norms that would require her to adhere to the feminine tenets of the (overwhelmingly white) cult of true womanhood, such as piety, submissiveness, and relegation to the private sphere. In effect, Parton’s “ghost husband” tempers her hypersexuality and allows her to cultivate her persona as a flirtatious tease, while maintaining respectability as a married woman who successfully navigates the sexist traps of

³⁹⁰ Sontag, 5.

³⁹¹ Moynihan and Warhol, 1.

being a woman in show business. In effect, Parton resists what Sontag calls “too much”³⁹² and instead promotes a more palatable form of “Camp Lite.”³⁹³ Parton explains that

I had a real pretty body when I was a girl, though it’s kind of gone downhill since then. When I went to Nashville they liked my personality, and I never sold myself out. I never went to bed with anybody unless I wanted to, never for business reasons.³⁹⁴

Parton explicitly defends her sexuality, only having sex when she “wanted to,” and simultaneously dismisses assumptions that she slept with the industry’s male gatekeepers to secure opportunities, which is an egregious reality of patriarchal show business. Additionally, when Parton posed for *Playboy* magazine in 1978, she wore the arguably conservative Playboy bunny costume and a giddy smile, while never revealing her famous breasts – only her cleavage that she affectionately calls the “valley of the dolls.”³⁹⁵ Further, music journalist Jim Ridley celebrates her compelling sexual contradictions, and enduring mysteries:

What’s particularly amazing about this singular talent, though, is that after all this time under constant scrutiny, Dolly Parton still remains an endlessly compelling tangle of mysteries and contradictions. She is a sex symbol who has yet to perform even a vaguely titillating love scene on screen. Her private life is an enigma—her 27-year open marriage to local asphalt contractor Carl Dean has baffled Music Row and the tabloids for decades. She sells records to both intolerant rednecks and a sizable gay and lesbian contingent.³⁹⁶

³⁹² Sontag, 7.

³⁹³ Paul Rudnick and Kurt Andersen, “The Irony Epidemic: How Camp Changed from Lush to Lite” *Spy*, (Mar. 1989).

³⁹⁴ Moynihan and Warhol, 1.

³⁹⁵ Lynn, 1.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19. It is worth noting here that in 2017, Parton still adheres to these same distinctions – she still has a disparate fan base, is married to the same man, and has never been in a sexually provocative movie role.

Moreover, Parton's assumed promiscuity due to her use of flirtatious sexual innuendos and camp aesthetic is simultaneously contained by her marital ethos and sexual inaccessibility. Her negotiations of this hypersexual/monogamous binary allow her to exercise invitational rhetoric toward audiences; but she sets distinct boundaries with her manicured public persona.

In 2014, a *Billboard* magazine reporter asked if she ever goes out in public not dressed as her recognizable, manicured self. Parton responded that

if I go anywhere, I go in full disguise. I'm afraid somebody will recognize me and say, "Oh, did you see Dolly? She looked like hell." I'd rather them say, "Did you see Dolly? She's so overdone."³⁹⁷

Here, Parton explains the negotiation required between her sexy, hyperbolic public persona and her private, inaccessible "simple" persona. Her goal is to maintain her aesthetic as someone "overdone" who is *visually* (not sexually) "too much." Even in her film roles, Dolly Parton may be playing a character, but she is always already recognizable as Dolly Parton. For example, in *9 to 5* (1980), *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1982), *Steel Magnolias* (1989), and *Joyful Noise* (2012), Parton dons big blonde wigs, tight fitting clothes, long painted fingernails, and speaks in a Southern accent. In effect, she maintains her sexy, feminine camp artifice that audiences expect, despite a fictional context.

Parton further negotiates her manicured, "overdone" public persona and her private life with "ghost husband" Carl Dean. She explains that even after returning home from touring on the road, she will tell Dean to "Get the camper; let's go somewhere ... I'm a gypsy. I want to do

³⁹⁷ Deborah Evans Price, "Dolly Parton Q&A: The Country Legend on 50 Years in Nashville and Why She Supports Her Gay Fans." *Billboard* (Oct. 24, 2014), 1.

that. My life is fairly simple when I'm out of the limelight."³⁹⁸ Parton's references to being (publically) overdone and (privately) simple negotiates her camp performance, but her emphasis on simplicity and her assumed monogamy emerges in many of her lyrics as well.

Her famous 1974 song "Jolene" narrates a wife's desperate appeal to her husband's mistress to move on and leave her husband alone. The character pleads

Your smile is like a breath of spring / your voice is soft like summer rain / and I cannot compete with you, Jolene ... And I can easily understand / how you could easily take my man ... but I could never love again. He's the only one for me, Jolene.

Parton's lyrics privilege monogamy, espouse the unpleasant realities of infidelity, and convey a refreshing lack of competition between women. In fact, during her 2016 Pittsburgh concert, Parton jokingly asked, "I wonder if [her husband] still got Jolene's number?" since Parton purports that Jolene was a real-life temptress.³⁹⁹ Another example is from her 1969 song "My Blue Ridge Mountain Boy," in which a female sex worker in New Orleans longs for her "boy" back home, who she regrets rejecting. She sings "the men ain't kind like my Blue Ridge Mountain boy ... I never will get over / Oh the sweet love of my Blue Ridge Mountain boy." These examples from Parton's 1969 song allude to the negotiation of survival through sex work and idealized, "simple" and youthful monogamy, which are enhanced by her references to religion that permeate her music. Parton's faith plays a sizable role in her third negotiation between being labeled a hypersexual, grotesque "monster" and being revered as a virtuous Christian. Her transgressive camp persona and at times vulgar sexual humor could easily be read

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ In actuality, the song was inspired by a "beautiful little girl of about nine or ten" named Jolene who asked Parton for an autograph after a show. However, Parton points out that claiming Jolene was a "fiery-haired vamp who tried to steal my husband... makes a much better song." Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 165.

as threatening; however, combined with her “ghost husband,” Parton’s overt faith tempers her potentially monstrous embodiment.

4.5 MONSTROUS / VIRTUOUS

Edward Ingebretsen argues that social monsters are political beings, tools in the hermeneutics of fear.⁴⁰⁰ Gendered monsters in the form of witches have been powerful, historical tools to warn men of women’s evil potential – especially if these women seek solidarity in groups and sisterhood.⁴⁰¹ Women are not the only marginalized population who are disciplined due to their assumed manipulative sexuality. Historically, gay men have been burdened with stereotypes and criminalization that stigmatize their existence and question their morality, forcing gay men to routinely create culture outside of mainstream outlets. Babuscio explains that camp is an attitude and practice that one employs because “when the world is a rejecting place, the need grows correspondingly strong to project one’s being – to explore the limits to which one’s personality might attain...both for fun as well as out of real need.”⁴⁰² Babuscio points out

⁴⁰⁰ Edward J. Ingebretsen, “Monster-Making: A Politics of Persuasion,” *Journal of American Culture* 21 (1998): 25.

⁴⁰¹ Victoria L. Godwin, “Love and Lack: Media, Witches, and Normative Gender Roles,” in *Media Depictions of Brides, Wives, and Mothers*, ed., Alana Amato Ruggerio (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 91.

⁴⁰² Babuscio, “Camp and the Gay Sensibility,” 22.

that camp provides protection from a rejecting world, but also a way to play with one's ability to make a "self-created face" out of creativity but also out of survival.⁴⁰³

As Charles Morris III explores, the Prohibition era "pansy" was a widely recognized figure, queer coded with a rhetorical nudge and knowing "textual wink."⁴⁰⁴ However, after the demise of Prohibition, the pansy's relatively hospitable public sphere eroded. This cultural fixture was made into a menace, most clearly manipulated by J. Edgar Hoover, the allegedly closeted director of the FBI. Unable to harness camp himself as a means of assuaging social stigma, Hoover exercised his authority by spearheading "homosexual panic" to stigmatize and criminalize same-sex desire. Thus, gay men were vilified as predatory monsters and forced into the shadows⁴⁰⁵ in order to "displace the antagonisms and horrors evidenced *within* society *outside* society itself."⁴⁰⁶ Similarly, women's sexuality has been historically repressed, so it is noteworthy that Parton writes that "sex is a much bigger part of what I want than most of us will admit."⁴⁰⁷ Ingebretsen explains that the monster "reconfirms the virtues of the normal for those who, from time to time, need persuading."⁴⁰⁸ This naming of the virtuous allows conversely for the naming of the deviant. Society thus "makes" monsters in order to absolve society of deviancy and mark those deemed uncivilized and a threat to society.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Morris III, 230. Additionally, further back in history the "dandy" originated in the late eighteenth century Britain, and was used to describe men in public space who prioritized aestheticism, fashion, linguistic refinement and leisure. This figure attempted to emulate aristocratic refinement while usually being of middle class status. A notable example of dandyism is famed literary figure Oscar Wilde.

⁴⁰⁵ Vito Russo, *Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

⁴⁰⁶ Frank Moretti, "Dialectic of Fear," in his *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*. (London: Verso, 1993), 84.

⁴⁰⁷ Parton, *Dolly*, 305.

⁴⁰⁸ Ingebretsen, 25.

Analogous to the “monster” is the grotesque body, which is coded as the failed female body that is uncontrollable and a great danger to men’s authority.⁴⁰⁹ Monsters, as transgressive and titillating, “may be coded as foreign or outlandish, [but] rarely are they alien. They are us, our failed selves.”⁴¹⁰ However, Bakhtin sees potential in the mixing of the sacred and profane. His theory of the carnivalesque celebrates the role of syncretic pageantry, which is the ritualistic behavior, gesture, or discourse that is freed from the hierarchical positions that may discipline it. In effect, carnival, akin to camp, brings together low and high culture, and becomes a place where “latent sides of human nature reveal and express themselves” regardless of class lines.⁴¹¹ Fox argues that “authentic” country music discourse is undoubtedly reliant on the carnivalesque, due to its “nudie suits, big hair, [and] gaudy production numbers” exposing the duality of country music discourse as natural, simple, and moral while also containing hyperbolic artifice, latent sexuality, and camp pageantry.⁴¹²

The carnivalesque most explicitly attends to class hierarchy; however, Natalie Zemon Davis explains how the trope of the grotesque, a politically and ideologically powerful figure of subversion, attends uniquely to gender.⁴¹³ The female grotesque has become an important concept in feminist criticism and gender studies since it helps to explain how certain bodies are disruptive and monstrous due to society’s inability to contain or accept them. The grotesque, unlike the classical body, emphasizes the “lower stratum” away from the face, eyes, and faculties

⁴⁰⁹ Kathleen Rowe, *Unruly Women: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1995), 33.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Carnival and the Carnivalesque,” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed., John Storey (New York: Routledge, 1998), 251.

⁴¹² Fox, “Recycled ‘Trash,’” 245.

⁴¹³ Natalie Z. Davis. “Women on Top,” in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975).

of reason.⁴¹⁴ The “protruding” female grotesque bears most relevance to hyperbolic camp figures like Dolly Parton, whose “cartoonish sexuality” becomes a marker of low class, and more specifically, low camp.⁴¹⁵ The female grotesque makes a spectacle of herself with her transgressive behavior because she “can examine, criticize, parody and ideally force people to question the supposed naturalness of social expectations, both physical and behavioral.”⁴¹⁶ Kathleen Rowe identifies Dolly Parton as an example of the female grotesque; however, I argue that Parton’s role as a camp icon complements her subversive embodiment as a grotesque, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of her disruptive yet palatable public persona.⁴¹⁷

Rendering queer men monstrous and women grotesque functions to render marginalized bodies as failed men and women because “gender failure, in commodity culture, is always a significant marker of evil.”⁴¹⁸ Jeffrey Brown argues that “white trash” female grotesques, who embody gender, race, and class failure, are used by media outlets as “cautionary tales” to instruct middle-class white women how to avoid committing transgressions, thus reinforcing disciplinary cultural standards of normalization.⁴¹⁹ Further, the queer, hypersexual, grotesque “monsters” are often coded as feminine, showing how misogyny intersects other sexual, class, and racial transgressions.⁴²⁰ Therefore, camp once again becomes a source of emancipatory potential for

⁴¹⁴ Rowe, *Unruly Women*, 33.

⁴¹⁵ Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 8.

⁴¹⁶ Jeffrey Brown, “Class and Feminine Excess: The Strange Case of Anna Nicole Smith,” *Feminist Review* 81 (2005): 82.

⁴¹⁷ Rowe, *Unruly Women*, 33.

⁴¹⁸ Ingebretsen, 28.

⁴¹⁹ Brown, “Class and Feminine Excess,” 74.

⁴²⁰ For example, many argue that villains are “queer coded,” meaning they are “othered” with markers of gender transgression, opulent cachet, and suspiciousness to reinscribe the protagonist as morally sound and more importantly – heterosexual e.g. Disney animated villains: Jafar (*Aladdin*, 1992), Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989), and Scar (*The Lion King*, 1994) among others; James Bond villains: Mr. Kid (*Diamonds are Forever*, 1971), Silva (*Skyfall*, 2012) etc.

those most impacted by disciplinary mechanisms of the state that criminalize and regulate “illegitimate” sexuality and embodiment outside cultural norms.

Sontag writes that “Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness.”⁴²¹ Camp has the ability to help women, gay men, people of color, and other vulnerable communities “cope with the reality of suffering, to defy powerlessness, and to carve out a space of freedom within a social world acknowledged to be hostile and oppressive.”⁴²² Camp performances are indicative of the way gay male culture encourages laughter in time of trauma and loss because “Camp is motivated by rage,” due to routine injustice and everyday burdens⁴²³ as well as the egregious inaction on matters that have disproportionately impacted the gay community, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Therefore, it is imperative that marginalized groups participate in intersectional self-expression, self-definition, and self-care. Audre Lorde confessed that “If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive.”⁴²⁴ Thus, camp sponsors playfulness as well as survival in times of vulnerability.

Parton writes “the worst thing about poverty is not the actual living of it, but the shame of it,” which “made me feel terrible – guilty, poor, and terrible.”⁴²⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that one of Parton’s favorite expressions is “[a]ngels fly because they take themselves lightly,” which acts as a reminder to leave behind the weight of past burdens, vulnerabilities, and her own

⁴²¹ Sontag, 12.

⁴²² Halperin, *How to Be Gay*, 219.

⁴²³ Charles Ludlam, “Assorted Maxims and Epigrams,” in *Ridiculous Theatre: Scourge of Human Folly* (New York: Theatre Communications, 1992), 254.

⁴²⁴ Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” *Sister Outsider*, 137. For a more thorough discussion on the subject of silence and its possibilities, see Lester Olson, “On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 49-70.

⁴²⁵ Parton, *Dolly*: 51.

self-importance in favor of playfulness.⁴²⁶ Kenneth Burke celebrates the cathartic release and fulfillment produced by laughter and tears, since they are “completions, *fulfillments*. Weeping or laughing are *end-products*” exposing why Parton’s camp performances, inviting personal stories, passionate self-expression, lightheartedness, lofty dreams, unrefined humor, and vivid imagination provide escapism and relief from her stigmatized social “failure” growing up in rural poverty.⁴²⁷ Parton’s optimism was evident in her 2016 concert during which she reminded the audience: “You should be proud of where you’re from. You should be proud of your religion. You should be proud of who you are,” highlighting the value of your regional roots, faith, and “immanent value” as an authentic person capable of ameliorating stigma and reclaiming one’s identity.⁴²⁸

While marked as social failures, marginalized groups can experience success in camp. Sontag writes that “camp is generous” because “it doesn’t sneer at someone who succeeds in being seriously dramatic. What it does is to find the success in certain passionate failures.”⁴²⁹ By reframing failure as something redeemable and worthwhile, camp offers a form of redemption and salvation that aligns with narratives of spirituality. Dolly Parton always says that her favorite song she ever wrote is her 1971 hit “Coat of Many Colors,” which tells the autobiographical story of her mother sewing her a brightly colored coat of donated rags that she wore with pride despite ridicule. Parton’s song is a form of invitational rhetoric because the “story is not told as a means of supporting or achieving some other end but as an end in itself – simply offering the perspective the story represents.”⁴³⁰ This narrative is not aiming to change the audience, but to

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁴²⁷ Kenneth Burke, “Catharsis—Second View,” *The Centennial Review* 5 (1961): 107.

⁴²⁸ Lynn, 1. Foss and Griffin, 4.

⁴²⁹ Sontag, 13.

⁴³⁰ Foss and Griffin, 7.

share Parton's feeling of success despite social failure, due to her innocent hyperbolic performance of camp style and contextually outrageous coat.⁴³¹ Additionally, this song also alludes to the Biblical story of Joseph, illuminating Parton's Christianity as a noteworthy component of her identity, storytelling, and camp persona.

In a 1984 interview with Dolly Parton, famed artist Andy Warhol asked Parton if she prayed. She responded:

Yes, all the time. As a child I was scared to death of hellfire and brimstone, but I loved to sing. Out of that I started to remember the things that really stuck in my mind, and I think that's followed me through the years, things like "Through God, all things are possible." I just remember the positive. I just thought, "I can't deal with this shit. There cannot be a God that is that mean and cruel, and if there is then I'm too afraid to deal with Him anyway." So I had to decide who I was, and what God meant to me. I feel that sin and evil are the negative part of you, and I think it's like a battery: you've got to have the negative and the positive in order to be a complete person. I used to punish myself a lot for things I felt, and then I'd just say, "Well, if it's wrong for me to feel this, why do I feel it?"⁴³²

Parton exposes her ambivalence about her faith; however, she is strengthened through her relationship to God and in turn, kinder to herself. She similarly employs her religion as an outspoken ally of the LGBTQ+ community, while others may use Christianity to rationalize bigotry and oppression. In 2014, Parton "came out" in explicit support of her queer fans.⁴³³ In response to a lesbian couple being refused entry to Dollywood, her theme park in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, Parton emphasized that her theme park is "a place for entertainment, a

⁴³¹ The famous song also inspired a 2015 television movie about Parton's childhood, which was the top watched NBC TV special of that year with 13.2 million viewers. <http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/ratings-dolly-partons-coat-of-many-colors-1201659231/>

⁴³² Moynihan and Warhol, 1.

⁴³³ While many fans suspect that Parton is a lesbian, she claims that if she were she would say so. Yet the "mystery" to her sexuality is alluring, refreshing, and even comforting to many fans – particularly those in the queer community.

place for *all* families, period.”⁴³⁴ However, this is not the first time Parton has engaged in public support of sexually marginalized communities.

Parton wrote and performed the critically acclaimed song “Travelin’ Thru” for the 2005 film *Transamerica* about a trans woman’s journey with her son. In a 2006 pre-Oscars interview for *The Tennessean* newspaper, Parton explained that empathy for outsiders, like those in the trans community, comes naturally to her. She shared that “I was used to not being accepted, because I’ve always been a weird, out-there freak myself. Some things are strange to me and some things are odd, but I don’t condemn. If you can accept me, I can accept you.”⁴³⁵ Parton’s willingness to share her perspective, in expectation that others will share theirs, aligns with Foss and Griffin’s invitational rhetoric. They state that the goal of this rhetorical theory is to highlight that “every being is a unique and necessary part of the patter of the universe and thus has imminent value,” despite being “odd” or “out-there.”⁴³⁶ Therefore, one is an expert in their own experiences and life story, and insights are gained by a respectful “exchange of ideas,” revealing why Parton is deeply admired by both her secular and Christian fans.⁴³⁷

Parton, as the granddaughter of a Pentecostal minister, is deeply spiritual and often speaks of her close, personal relationship with God without reinscribing rhetorics of domination. However, she is not shy about critiquing those who advocate Christianity without practicing acceptance. She points out that Christians, in particular, should not pass judgment because the “sin of judging is just as bad as any other sin [Christians] might say somebody else is

⁴³⁴ Price, 1.

⁴³⁵ Peter Cooper, “Dolly Knows What Outcasts Feel: Parton’s Own Life Drives Message of her Oscar-Nominated Song,” *The Tennessean* (2005): 1.

⁴³⁶ Foss and Griffin, 4.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

committing. I try to love everybody.”⁴³⁸ Parton offers support and empathy to her queer fans and defends their imminent value by “calling *in*” judgmental Christians, rather than “calling out” Christian fans in an attempt to change their minds. Parton *invites* them to love more than judge. In a *Billboard* interview, she said “I think everybody should be allowed to be who they are, and to love who they love...Lord, I’ve got enough problems of my own to pass judgment on somebody else.”⁴³⁹ Parton’s use of Christianity and her personal story as means to support queer communities further demonstrates her negotiation of her potentially monstrous, even grotesque embodiment and religious, moral enlightenment. Thus, Parton destabilizes the false dichotomy between the queer and the pious through her role as a Christian camp icon, using her own personal challenges as an invitation for her audiences to reflect upon their own story.⁴⁴⁰

In response to her invitational rhetoric, fans voice appreciation for her candid openness that promotes LGBTQ+ inclusivity – as a welcome departure from conservative and homophobic country music traditions and strategic silences.⁴⁴¹ During her “Pure and Simple” tour, Parton made a point of preaching acceptance and pride in one’s identity to the audience. Parton’s form of “gospel” is especially important since she reaches disparate audiences that range from conservative Christians to queer communities. Parton, as a unique camp icon who transcends genres and generations, has the potential to foment consciousness raising that opens the minds of audience members who may negate the experiences of those who are perceived as monstrous enemies.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴³⁹ Price, 1.

⁴⁴⁰ Sally Miller Gearhart, “Womanpower: Energy Re-sourcing,” in *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*, ed., Charlene Spretnak (Garden City: NY, Anchor, 1982).

⁴⁴¹ Ridley, 22.

CONCLUSION

Parton's "love" for everybody aligns with Sontag's viewpoint that "camp is a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation – not judgment" and that "Camp taste is a kind of love, love for human nature. It relishes, rather than judges."⁴⁴² Thus, it is necessary for camp to be recognized as an inclusive, ever-changing, strategy of invitational rhetoric for joyful self-representation. In this chapter, I challenged critics' patriarchal rhetorics of domination that mischaracterize camp as misogynist and exclusively "owned" by white gay men. In doing so, I attempt to demonstrate camp's utility for promoting understanding, gender play, and alliances among and between marginalized groups. By exploring Dolly Parton's role as a camp icon, feminine subject, and feminist case study of invitational rhetoric, I dismantle the three false binaries of artifice/authenticity, hypersexuality/monogamy, and monstrous/virtuous in order to explore how her negotiations of camp appeal to disparate audiences, spread camp tenets such as "love for human nature," and contribute to underexplored areas of camp scholarship.

In effect, Parton's multidimensional camp persona and legible markers of morality intersect to promote a worldview that supports countercultural expression that can be appreciated for its emancipatory potential among marginalized groups and within the overlooked genre of country music. Specifically, Parton's performance of camp can be read as an effective

⁴⁴² Sontag, 13.

communicative approach of invitational rhetoric. In an era in which postfeminist and postracial attitudes may shroud the need for feminist activism and racial justice, landmark Supreme Court decisions in favor of marriage equality have the potential for promoting a whitewashed, assimilationist “postqueerness” that eclipses the violence experienced by queer communities. Additionally, rape culture is routinely overlooked as a salient symptom of the larger U.S. brand of xenophobic, hegemonic masculinity that often attacks anything deemed feminine and/or foreign. Furthermore, many argue that these “post” narratives have led to complacency among activists, elided the continued marginalization of vulnerable communities, and underestimated the angry cultural backlash incited by legal and social progress of minorities. Therefore, subversive forms of expression, like camp, provides an opportunity to spur understand and reciprocate a shared humanity despite trying, hostile climates.⁴⁴³ Moreover, camp is an invitation to appreciate and participate in dignified, joyful, and emotional self-expression, while simultaneously promoting solidarity and powerful alliances that transcend identity and music genre. After all, “Camp is a tender feeling.”⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ However, it is worth pointing out that audiences often love minority celebrities, artists, and athletes, but are not willing to speak out against injustice that impacts these celebrities’ communities. Perhaps opening up a space of invitational rhetoric between celebrities and audiences will help to share perspectives. Thus, fewer audiences will demand silenced “apolitical” celebrities in favor of recognizing how *the personal is political* – a necessary feminist sentiment that is pertinent to celebrities, artists, and athletes who are often met with hostility when trying to challenge the status quo. Rather, public figures could invite audiences to reciprocate understanding as to why they cannot and will not be apolitical.

⁴⁴⁴ Sontag, 13.

5.0 CHAPTER 5: LORETTA LYNN

5.1 RHETORICAL REBELLIONS: IDENTIFICATIONS AMONG RELUCTANT FEMINISTS

In recent years, many communication and feminist rhetorical scholars have taken keen interest in the potential links between violence, gender performance, and the medium of music.⁴⁴⁵ Additionally, popular documentaries accessible to lay audiences such as *Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (2006), *Dream Worlds* (2006), *Miss Representation* (2011), and *The Mask You Live In* (2015), make explicit arguments about masculinity, music, and violence. The heightened discourse that explores American music's relationship to verbal and physical violence routinely critiques the influence of homophobia, misogyny, and racism⁴⁴⁶ on young men. More specifically, these critiques and explorations almost exclusively look at violent manifestations in

⁴⁴⁵ Elias Krell, "'Who's the Crack Whore at the End?' Performance, Violence, and Sonic Borderlands in the Music of Yva las Vegass," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 35 (2015): 95-118. Jessica Prody, "Protesting War and Hegemonic Masculinity in Music Videos: Audioslave's 'Doesn't Remind Me,'" *Women's Studies in Communication* 38 (2015): 440-461. Suzanne Enck and Blake McDaniel, "Playing with Fire: Cycles of Domestic Violence in Eminem and Rihanna's 'Love the Way You Lie,'" *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5 (2012): 618-644. Bryan McCann, "Contesting the Mark of Criminality: Race, Place, and the Prerogative of Violence in N.W.A.'s Straight Outta Compton," *Critical Studies in Communication* 29 (2012): 367-386. Jonel Thaller and Jill Theresa Messing, "(Mis)Perceptions around Intimate Partner Violence in the Music Video and Lyrics for 'Love the Way You Lie,'" *Feminist Media Studies* 14 (2014): 623-639. Tanya Horeck, "#AskThick: 'Blurred Lines,' Rape Culture, and the Feminist Hashtag Takeover," *Feminist Media Studies* 14 (2014): 1105-1117.

⁴⁴⁶ Specifically, the forms of racism are both internalized anti-blackness and oppression of white supremacy.

the contemporary music genres of rap, hip hop, and hard rock. Scholars argue that hypermasculinity fosters identifications and a sense of belonging among straight presenting men, and in turn, suppresses “feminine” attributes such as homosocial intimacy, which spurs men’s isolation, anger, violence, criminality, and sometimes suicide.⁴⁴⁷ Men, thus, become complicit in policing and enforcing the arbitrary gender binary between the masculine and feminine in attempts to prove their belonging, and secure their ability to access masculine, heterosexual privileges – especially Black men who have been historically emasculated.⁴⁴⁸

Critical scholarship on music, masculinity, and violence routinely explores Black men’s music culture specifically, since it is interpreted often as distinctively hypermasculine, misogynist, and violent. Lott argues that the sensationalizing of African American violence purports a narrative around music in which “the Black urban poor are conceived of as an isolated group of individuals whose behavior is aberrant and dominated by pathological cultural values.”⁴⁴⁹ The “ghettocentric” imagery⁴⁵⁰ of contemporary Black music stems, in part, from the depiction of the “primitive” Blues musical subject as a product of rural poverty.⁴⁵¹ Gates, however, argues that contemporary rap and hip hop is an opportunity to “explode” racist and classist stereotypes, through hyperbole, and respond to years of controlling images around the

⁴⁴⁷ Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: Angry Masculinity at the End of an Era* (NY: Nation Books, 2013), 212. Kimmel points out that the highest suicide rates are most often white boys and men from rural agrarian regions. These regions also engage in some of the biggest country music consumption.

⁴⁴⁸ Michael Kimmel *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (NY: HarperCollins, 2008), 10.

Cheryl Clarke, “Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community” in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 190-201.

⁴⁴⁹ Tommy L. Lott, *The Invention of Race: Black Culture and the Politics of Representation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 111.

⁴⁵⁰ Ronald L. Jackson II, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 79.

⁴⁵¹ Stephen A. King, “Memory, Mythmaking and Museums: Constructive Authenticity and the Primitive Blues Subject.” *Southern Communication Journal* 71 (2006): 235-250.

Black male body.⁴⁵² Yet, as Kimberlé Crenshaw critiques, the impulse to defend Black men's misogynist, violent music negates the lyrics' impact on women of color who are targeted,⁴⁵³ via anti-black misogyny that Moya Bailey labels misogynoir.⁴⁵⁴

While these debates regarding analyses of Black music culture are important, contemporary explorations of gender, race, and violence largely omit discussion of other music genres and variations of androcentric violent posturing. In effect, very few scholars and critics in the popular press recognize and explore the deeply violent, white, and masculine origins of folk, bluegrass, and country music. More specifically, they ignore the longstanding influence of the murder ballad and its subsequent impact on women in country music – such as Loretta Lynn. Lynn's efforts to employ rhetorical strategies that would appeal to women and not threaten men is an apt case study to understand how her unique violent posturing, social rebellion, and feminist sentiments reflect her own burgeoning self-confidence, which aligns with the narratives of the feminist movement of the late-1960s through the 1970s. In this chapter, I analyze Loretta Lynn's rhetorical rebellions, as exemplars of the comic frame and feminine style, to explore how the largely antifeminist country music industry affords freedoms and imposes limits on women.

In what follows, I briefly trace the violent murder ballad as an overlooked subgenre in “country music,” in order to explore how the *murderess* ballad signals a shift to the comic frame, which Lynn mobilized. Then, I point out Lynn's use of feminine style, which catapulted her popularity beyond the limits of the country music genre. Next, I discuss how Lynn's overt feminist arguments in the mid-1970s, as a combination of comic frame and feminine style, was

⁴⁵² Henry Louis Gates, “2 Live Crew, Decoded,” *New York Times* (June 19, 1990).

⁴⁵³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1283.

⁴⁵⁴ See Moya Bailey, “Race, Region, and Gender in Early Emory School of Medicine Yearbooks” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008), 26. Kelly Macias, “‘Sisters in the Collective Struggle’: Sounds of Silence and Reflections on the Unspoken Assault on Black Females in Modern America” *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 15 (2015): 260-264.

rejected by industry gatekeepers, exposing the limits placed on women in country music. In conclusion, I touch on the problems with contemporary country music's return to the apolitical tragic frame, which thwarts feminist sentiments and lauds "reluctant feminists" as token success stories in this consistently sexist music genre. Overall, this analysis points out the overlooked margins of rhetoric in regard to women in country music and illuminates how contemporary shortcomings in this genre could be aided by the study of noteworthy rhetors like Loretta Lynn.

5.2 THE MURDER BALLAD AND THE TRAGIC FRAME

LITERATURE REVIEW

In their 2003 anthology *Finding Her Voice*, music scholars Bufwack and Oermann, explore the archetypal murder ballad, which details the "murder of a hapless, pregnant girl by a boyfriend who is unwilling to marry her."⁴⁵⁵ Dating back to early 19th century British folksongs such as "Pretty Polly," the murder ballad spread in the US in the late 19th and early 20th century as a notable subgenre in the burgeoning folk music of Appalachia.⁴⁵⁶ The murder ballad offers

⁴⁵⁵ Bufwack and Oermann, 17.

⁴⁵⁶ The demarcation between folk, bluegrass and hillbilly music is not particularly relevant to this discussion since the murder ballad, as a subgenre, was present in each genre. Bluegrass was influenced by folk music as well as African American gospel and blues, yet is predominantly performed by white musicians. Hillbilly is the former name of what is now known as country music. I use "folk" music as an umbrella concept, and genre, rooted in Appalachia, a region stemming from southern New York south to Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi.

grisly details of the tragic murder of “fair” (i.e. white, unadulterated) young women at the hands of her white, male intimate partner. These popular songs, performed and recorded from around 1900-1950, were often cautionary tales, laden with morals. Yet, they predominantly encouraged young women to remain passive by warning against the dangers of immodesty.⁴⁵⁷

Teresa Goddu argues that the murder ballad was simply means to control the “threat” of female sexuality. Tunnell, in his content analysis of murder ballads, writes that this noteworthy subgenre within the genre of country music reveals three distinct patterns:

First, in almost every case, the murder occurs between acquaintances and nearly always where a man kills a woman. Second, the woman’s death is nearly always a violent one where her body is cruelly disposed of (e.g. thrown into a body of water). Third, the murders depicted in song are characterized by either a lack of explanation for the violent acts or an explanation based on the man’s jealousy and desire to possess the woman.⁴⁵⁸

Goddu explains that the murder ballad functions to neutralize and domesticate female sexuality, for which the antidote is death.⁴⁵⁹ Paradoxically, murder ballads represent both male dominance and a lack of control.

Bufwack and Oermann argue that the popularity, and eventual normalization of this morbid, violent subgenre of country music, aligned with the number of real life examples of

Since land was either occupied by colonizers, rightfully resistant Native Americans, or too expensive, poor immigrants from Ireland and Scotland settled in the challenging and at times unforgiving terrain of the Appalachian Mountain range.

⁴⁵⁷ Bufwack and Oermann, 17.

⁴⁵⁸ Kenneth D. Tunnell, “Blood Marks the Spot where Poor Ellen was Found: Violent Crime in Bluegrass Music,” *Popular Music and Society* 153 (1991): 101.

⁴⁵⁹ This narrative is also common in contemporary slasher films in which the woman who has sex in the film is often the first to be murdered – clearly punishing the promiscuous “girl” and rewarding the virginal woman who typically survives the villain’s attacks. See Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 35. Clover argues that audiences are encouraged to share the perspective of the killer, but eventually their point of view is shifted to the “final girl” - the virginal “hero,” who is moral, disciplined, and tomboyish, and who defeats the killer or escapes.

violence against women.⁴⁶⁰ The murder ballad's popularity acted as a morose reflection of gendered brutality in an era where "domestic violence" was not only unintelligible, it was legal. Specifically, the archetypal murder ballad "begins with woman's power over men, but ends, as all these songs do, with female sexuality neutralized or domesticated by death."⁴⁶¹ I share this background on the murder ballad because it not only points out the often overlooked violent themes of country music and their connection to gender, it is significant to the study of rhetoric. I argue that the murder ballad, and its uncritical endorsement of violence, is a noteworthy example of what Kenneth Burke calls the "tragic frame."

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke suggests that art forms function as "equipment for living," which are symbolic resources and strategies for people who must address and resolve the personal problems they face.⁴⁶² In other words, when a tragic event occurs, people find ways to come to terms with the event. However, the tragic frame (i.e. naming the event, making it a political symbol, expunging the evil within, and restoring social order) poses striking limits to the possibility of self-reflection and social accountability. Burke recognizes that the tragic frame is limited because it can do harm to society by disabling critical interrogations of public issues.⁴⁶³ The tragic frame demands the damnation of the criminal "Other." Then, the sympathetic victim (e.g., the fair maiden of the murder ballad) is recognized and revered, but not

⁴⁶⁰ Bufwack and Oermann, 17.

⁴⁶¹ Teresa Goddu, "Bloody Daggers and Lonesome Graveyards: The Gothic and Country Music," in *Reading Country Music*, ed. Cecelia Tichi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 55. Similarly, lynchings were "justified" without any legal structure or measured discourse. Rather, racist sensationalism was employed to rationalize the brutality. A common trope was convincing mobs that a White woman was raped or attacked by a Black man, or a Black woman was used as a substitute for the intended target, or was convicted of protesting as was the case of the 1918 lynching of Mary Turner in southern Georgia. Thus, White "heroes" enacted enthusiastic revenge on the "villainous" Black body.

⁴⁶² Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941), 302-4.

⁴⁶³ Christina Foust and William O'Shannon Murphy, "Revealing and Reframing Apocalyptic Tragedy in Global Warming Discourse," *Environmental Communication* 3 (2009): 151-167.

permanently capable of spurring consciousness since the status quo is restored. Thus, we as the audience are welcomed to scapegoat the evil, murderous man, but not interrogate the supposed “naturalness” of unpredictable, violent masculinity. Outrage dissipates and audiences are free from guilt and accountability; they are rendered apolitical.

In response to the limits of the tragic frame, Burke proposes the alternative of the comic frame. The comic frame allows audiences to see the ways an error “may be corrected rather than punished.”⁴⁶⁴ According to Burke, “the progress of humane enlightenment can go no further than in picturing people not as vicious, but as mistaken.”⁴⁶⁵ In order to demonstrate the salient shift in country music from the tragic to comic frame, I look to the *murderess* ballad. This upbeat, innuendo laden response to the murder ballad, depicts the killing of a man by his hoodwinked female lover. Most famously, “Frankie and Johnny” was a murderess ballad, dating back to the early 20th century, in which Frankie dramatically guns down her cheating Johnny in a bar.

The comic frame is “not about seeing humor in everything,” but is about maximizing consciousness through self-awareness.⁴⁶⁶ While tragedy leads to punishment, “the comic leads to dialectic.”⁴⁶⁷ Rather than stoically and inexplicably murdering her lover, Frankie tracks him down in a crowded bar, confronts him with a little gun and complains of his cheating before “taking him to the graveyard” for “doing her wrong.” From here, Frankie vows to swear off philandering men. This exchange is loud, performative, and “comical” because it repositions women, not as deviate creatures who secretly brutalize their lovers, but as performative figures

⁴⁶⁴ Barry Brummett, “Burkean Comedy and Tragedy, Illustrated in Reactions to the Arrest of John Delorean,” *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984): 219.

⁴⁶⁵ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes towards History* 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1959/1984), 41.

⁴⁶⁶ Stanley Edgar Hyman, “Kenneth Burke and the Criticism of Symbolic Action,” in *Landmark Essay on Kenneth Burke*, ed., Barry Brummett (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1993), 29.

⁴⁶⁷ Dustin Bradley Goltz, “Perspectives by Incongruity: Kenneth Burke and Queer Theory,” *Genders Online Journal* 45 (2007): para. 18.

who seek grandiose, public revenge – especially when performed in 1933 by ritzy, camp icon Mae West.⁴⁶⁸ Incongruous to traditional depictions of victimized women, “Frankie and Johnny” functions as a reversal of the typical plot that upends the status quo through hyperbolic confrontation. Or perhaps “Frankie and Johnny” is comical because women seeking revenge is dismissed as improbable. Country music fans have historically endorsed visions of passive femininity that “imply a woman’s identity [is] defined through her husband.”⁴⁶⁹ Thus, the murderess ballad, by combining women and antagonistic revenge narratives, challenges conventions of femininity and creates perspective by incongruity.

Perspective by incongruity is Burke’s persuasive method that produces a new viewpoint by “violating the ‘proprieties’ of [a] word in its previous linkages” by taking the word/idea to a new “setting” with new considerations.⁴⁷⁰ This persuasive method is a “methodic merger of particles that had been considered mutually exclusive,” opening up a new space for dialogue.⁴⁷¹ Christiansen and Hanson illuminate how AIDS activists employed perspective by incongruity as a way to disrupt silence and foment exuberant solidarity in a time of tragedy.⁴⁷² Similarly, Demo explores this method’s potential in her analysis of the Guerrilla Girls’ feminist performance art.⁴⁷³ Thus, the murderess ballad, by merging seemingly incongruous “particles” of femininity and revenge, offers listeners the comic frame. The murderess ballad helped to shift the narrative

⁴⁶⁸ Recording accessed January 22, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yuw27SrVVL8>

⁴⁶⁹ Beverly Keel, “Between Riot Grrrl and Quiet Girl: The New Women’s Movement in Country Music,” in *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music*, eds. Kristine McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 159.

⁴⁷⁰ Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1935), 90.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, lv.

⁴⁷² Adrienne Christiansen and Jeremy Hanson, “Comedy as a Cure for Tragedy: ACT UP and the Rhetoric of AIDS,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82 (1996): 157-170.

⁴⁷³ Anne Teresa Demo, “The Guerrilla Girls’ Comic Politics of Subversion,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 23 (2000): 133-156.

trajectory of the country music genre in the 20th century – making it less morose and more mainstream.

President Richard Nixon, when opening Opryland in 1974, underscored the national image of contemporary country music as “clean” and family friendly. He stated that this revered genre “talks about family. It talks about religion. And it...makes America a better country.”⁴⁷⁴ Goddu points out that country music’s contemporary reputation blatantly overlooks its complicated, violent roots. While many tout the romanticized “lawlessness” of the “old South” such as the one depicted in Willie Nelson’s 1976 compilation album *Wanted! The Outlaws*, more specific depictions such as the 1972 film *Deliverance* speak to the “devilish, perverted image of the South” as a backward, uncivilized, brutish culture that could not be contained.⁴⁷⁵

Contemporary country music narratives since the 1950s have supplanted the anxieties of the lawless “South” with the “new South” – a quaint, white, and stable patriarchal American narrative, with a soundtrack to match.⁴⁷⁶ However, “new” male-dominated country music⁴⁷⁷ often ignores women’s salient, historical contributions as rhetors in the genre – such as prolific musician and songwriter Loretta Lynn who released her 40th album in 2016.⁴⁷⁸ Lynn employs distinct rhetorical strategies (whether she knows it or not), which have sustained her career that spans sixty years. In the following analysis, I analyze three distinct eras of Lynn’s career during the 1960s and 1970s, which expose the freedoms available to her through the comic frame and

⁴⁷⁴ Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens, 1986), 155.

⁴⁷⁵ Goddu, “Bloody Daggers,” 48.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁷⁷ This “new country” is often pejoratively called “bro-country.” This term was first used by music journalist Jody Rosen to describe a trend marked by dozens of “unself-conscious” generic white men who sing about pickup trucks, beer, and attractive women. Many of these performers are criticized for not writing music, not playing instruments, taking from other music genres, and ignoring topics of substance in favor of apolitical, commercially driven, generics. Accessed on January 19, 2017. <http://www.vulture.com/2013/08/rise-of-bro-country-florida-georgia-line.html>

⁴⁷⁸ Accessed on February 21, 2017. <http://www.lorettalynn.com/>

feminine style, as well as the limits imposed on her by country music industry gatekeepers, who are threatened by women's solidarity.

Specifically, I analyze Lynn's #1 hit songs "Don't Come Home A Drinkin' (With Lovin' on Your Mind)" (1966) and "Fist City" (1968) as "comical" euphemistic challenges to her *personal* status quo. Next, I explore her #1 songs "Coal Miner's Daughter" (1970) and "You're Lookin' at Country" (1971) to highlight Lynn's shift to employing "Feminine Style" as a source of experiential knowledge and self-confidence amidst the culmination of Second Wave feminism. Next, I point out her most provocative shift, when she combines feminine style and the comic frame in order to question women's *collective* struggle and admonish patriarchal oppression via "Rated X" (1973) and "The Pill" (1975), which led to swift backlash in the country music industry. Then I discuss the long-term impact of this backlash that influences the genre today.

5.3 BUTCHER HOLLER'S CHILD BRIDE

Loretta Webb was supposedly born in 1932 in Butcher Hollow, Kentucky the second oldest of eight children.⁴⁷⁹ She left her mother and father's home when she married Oliver "Doolittle" Lynn. According to her autobiography *Coal Miner's Daughter*, she was only thirteen years old when she wed the twenty-one year old Lynn; however, multiple sources claim she was actually sixteen or even seventeen years old. In Mari Boor Tonn's exploration of the rhetorical appeals enacted by Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, she points out that Jones, a charismatic, white haired widow and effective union agitator and activist, exaggerated her elderly stature to fit her rhetorical style as a "prophet and matriarch."⁴⁸⁰ Similarly, celebrities may shape their narrative to fit with a selective public persona. Burke calls this a "representative anecdote," an approach to *select* reality in a dramatic fashion that *deflects* reality.⁴⁸¹ Lynn wrote that when she and "Doo" were dating over Christmastime, he "bought me a doll and said we were gonna get married and that next Christmas we'd have a real live doll. I didn't know what he was talking about."⁴⁸² The following month on January 10, Lynn did marry the Army veteran, who gifted her the child's

⁴⁷⁹ Lynn pronounces and spells this location "Butcher Holler." While several sources claim she was born in 1932, her purported age at different times in her life does not support this.

⁴⁸⁰ Mari Boor Tonn, "Militant Motherhood: Labor's Mary Harris 'Mother' Jones," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82 (1996): 2.

⁴⁸¹ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945), 59. Other examples include Michael Jackson lying about his age to appear younger and thus more impressive as a musical prodigy. Additionally, politicians may exaggerate their "humble beginnings" as an attempt to identify with disenfranchised voters.

⁴⁸² Loretta Lynn and George Vecsey, *Loretta Lynn: Coal Miner's Daughter* (Chicago: Vintage Books, 1976), 48.

toy. In an effort to defend their relationship, Doolittle explained in a 1977 interview that, “You gotta understand girls mature faster back in the hills; I knew I wanted Loretta as soon as I saw her on the school yard playing ring-around-the-rosie.”⁴⁸³ Lynn was pregnant with her first child four months after their courthouse wedding. With no sex education, Lynn confesses that “My Daddy used to tell me they got me by turning over a cabbage leaf—and I believed it...I was just so young.”

In her bestselling 1976 autobiography, Lynn recalls the moment a doctor told her she was pregnant: “I couldn’t believe it. Here I used to tell Mommy I didn’t want to rock her babies no more, and now I was gonna have one of my own. All I could think about was Doolittle telling me I was gonna have my own doll by next Christmas.”⁴⁸⁴ This infantilizing anecdote, whether true or embellished, makes Lynn’s success that much more impressive since she was a child bride who married the first person who asked. Lynn had four children by the age of eighteen and was supposedly a grandmother by the age of thirty-four. While I do not argue that Lynn purposefully tries to mislead audiences, I argue that her “representative anecdotes” reinscribe the often mythic narrative of rural poverty and the “backward” culture of the South and Appalachia specifically. Because of Lynn’s choice in anecdotes that have constructed her narrative as authentic, audiences were not threatened by her early songs that featured militant, violent themes because she was routinely infantilized as a “little lady” who was admittedly “too young to be living with a man.”⁴⁸⁵

When Lynn was eighteen, her husband bought her a guitar from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue and convinced her she should teach herself how to play. She recalls that “I’ve always

⁴⁸³ Joan Dew, *Singers & Sweethearts: The Women of Country Music* (New York: Dolphin/Doubleday, 1977), 20.

⁴⁸⁴ Lynn and Vecsey, 52.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

liked to sing. But the singing career was Doolittle's idea."⁴⁸⁶ At the age of twenty-four, Doolittle convinced Loretta to sing in public. When a local radio show duo, the Penn Brothers, hired her to sing at a local Grange, Loretta could not believe it: "I got scared, real scared. Doolittle told me I was going to sing, scared or not. He told me I was stupid. That made me so mad I made up my mind to sing."⁴⁸⁷ Doolittle and Loretta continued to spar over her career; however, Doolittle routinely was an advocate for Loretta and her talents as a singer and songwriter – almost as if he were caring for a naïve child.

Lynn recalls sneaking into clubs in which she was performing, because she "didn't look old enough to sing in a tavern."⁴⁸⁸ She asserts that, "I already had four kids, but I acted like a baby; I was so bashful it was pitiful. If Doolittle didn't keep telling me I was a stupid hillbilly, I never would of [sic] made it." Later that year, Lynn had her first hit song with "I'm a Honky Tonk Girl" (1960), because she and Doo would travel around begging radio stations to play it. When Loretta did make it to Nashville, with the financial support of a sponsor who believed in her talent, she sang her rebellious lyrics in a cute, comical, and palatable way.

In a 1965 television appearance on the *Wilburn Brothers Show*, Lynn was introduced by one of the brothers who hosted the show. I include the full introduction because it reveals the frame through which Lynn's music was offered to audiences.

Now ladies and gentlemen, we'd like for you to meet our little lady friend here. She may not wear as wild a' hats as some of you ladies out there, but she wears as many. First of all, she's an excellent songwriter, an outstanding artist, a very devoted wife and mother, a wonderful cook. She has a voice like an angel and a face to match. Let's meet and greet our little lady singer, Loretta Lynn. Here she is.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 76.

After she sang a song written for her by Betty Sue Perry called “The Home You’re Tearing Down” about a wife’s plea to her husband’s mistress, the audience does not hear Lynn speak. Rather, the host speaks at length *for* Lynn in a rather unique paternalistic style – compared to the other three headstrong artists I explore in this dissertation who were known to stand up for themselves on and off camera.

5.4 LYNN’S COLLOQUIAL CUTE

Despite being in her thirties, Lynn’s infantilized “little lady” persona is significant since it enhances her seemingly simple, “naïve mountain girl” aesthetic that supports country music tropes of white femininity. More importantly, Lynn’s aesthetic and persona eschews an ethos of adulthood, and the burgeoning glamorous style that was often expected of women on television. Additionally, her husband would not let her wear makeup. However, this could have been calculated to capitalize on the privileges afforded bashful, young “good white girls.” Lynn writes that “disc jockeys were nice to me everywhere. I looked like a kid – my hair was curly back in those days and Doolittle never let me wear any makeup.” As Moon points out, white women’s credibility within white communities is deeply intertwined with “respectability” and one’s ability

to appeal to bourgeois characteristics of purity, temperance, and refinement.⁴⁸⁹ However, without upper-class refinement or markers of bourgeois decorum, how does Lynn mobilize privileges in the country music community? I argue that Lynn, in her early career, mobilized what I call the “colloquial cute” rhetorical style that highlights her youth, naiveté, and a *lack* of refinement through feminine, “anti-intellectual” communication.

Often associated with Japan, “cute culture” is a potentially fitting lens through which to analyze ethnically imbued performances of girlish femininity – particularly women in music like Lynn who had to negotiate a conservative music genre during the second wave. Lukacs argues that cute culture was created and maintained by young Japanese women. However, by the mid-1990s, manufacturers appropriated and then commodified it in order to saturate consumer culture with “cute” merchandizing – such as the now ubiquitous Hello Kitty brand.⁴⁹⁰ Kinsella argues that this was a strategy that allowed young women to escape and resist adulthood.⁴⁹¹ In effect, by acting childlike, one can avoid responsibility and reprimand.⁴⁹² Unlike the other women I analyze in this dissertation, Lynn did not challenge the industry’s underestimation of her – rather she mobilized it. By routinely referring to herself as a hillbilly and highlighting her infantilized “cute” naiveté that was undergirded by her youthful, “little lady” aesthetics, Lynn enacted a regionally rooted version of “cute culture” that ensured she would be cared for by paternalistic

⁴⁸⁹ Dreauna Moon, “White Enculturation and Bourgeois Ideology: The Discursive Production of ‘Good (White) Girls,’” in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*, eds. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 182.

⁴⁹⁰ Gabriella Lukacs, “The Labor of Cute: Net Idols, Cute Culture, and the Digital Economy in Contemporary Japan” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 23 (2015): 496.

⁴⁹¹ Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed., Brian Moeran and Lise Skov (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1995), 220–54.

⁴⁹² I think of US instantiations of this rhetorical strategy. One example is Jessica Simpson as the virginal bride depicted on the MTV reality show “Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica.” She often adopted an innocent, naïve “dumb blonde” persona, which she argued was only a ploy. Additionally, her affectionate father was her manager. By seeming incompetent, straight, childlike, White, youthful, and traditionally pretty – Simpson is able to mobilize the consent of powerful men. The irony is that this “dumb blonde” and her “Newlyweds” husband got divorced, she married a Yale graduate, and she is now the billionaire mogul behind her fashion enterprise.

white men of the country music industry. Yet, she was never sexually exploited (i.e. expected to have sex with industry gatekeepers) because of the physical presence of her brutish paternalistic husband.

However, as Lynn's career began to take off and her ethos developed, she reflected upon the infantilizing dynamics of her marriage. In her autobiography Lynn shared that "I feel there's better ways to handle a woman than whipping her into line," pointing out that "Doo would take a belt to me as quick as he would to one of [our kids]." ⁴⁹³ Thus, Doolittle conflated his roles as father and husband, further infantilizing his wife because "he treated me like one of the kids."⁴⁹⁴ Because her father was gentle, Lynn explained that she was unprepared for the combative and abusive relationship she had with her husband – especially early on in their marriage. Doolittle continued to be a persistent patriarchal presence in Loretta's private life and public career, and her early "colloquial cute" performances reflect this. However, the couple's power dynamic was complicated when Loretta began to "grow up" and started writing songs that rebelled against his repression and womanizing.

⁴⁹³ Lynn and Vecsey, 11. Dew, 20.

⁴⁹⁴ Dew, 20.

5.5 MILITANT MATRIMONY AND LYNN'S FIRST REBELLIONS

Lynn has talked openly about her disapproval of her husband's infidelity and alcoholism. In her 1976 autobiography, Lynn writes that "It was bad enough being fourteen and pregnant. But it was even worse when Doolittle kicked me out."⁴⁹⁵ While her many stories about her husband are both loving and heartbreaking, Lynn was clear in her evolving 1960s public persona that she was no "weepy doormat."⁴⁹⁶ In 1966, Lynn released a series of successful songs that she wrote, which I label her "militant matrimony" era, in which she gleefully sang of personal defiance against her husband and espoused threats of violence against the generic "other woman." To analyze this era in which Lynn "gained a voice," I look specifically at her two #1 hits that she wrote and performed: "Don't Come Home A Drinkin' (With Loving on Your Mind)" (1966) and "Fist City" (1968).⁴⁹⁷

Lynn has acknowledged that "most of my fan club is women, which is how I want it," signaling her desire to speak to women specifically.⁴⁹⁸ While many genres of music espoused themes of defiance, activism, and women's empowerment throughout the 1960s and 1970s, country music has been reticent to publically adopt progressive sentiments. Deanna Sellnow notes that "female musicians who wanted to reflect women's issues in their music and be

⁴⁹⁵ Lynn and Vecsey, 53.

⁴⁹⁶ Keel, "Between Riot Grrrl and Quiet Girl," 156.

⁴⁹⁷ Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 16.

⁴⁹⁸ Lynn and Vecsey, 84.

successful in terms of popularity tended to sugar-coat the issues to the extent that they were dismissed as trivial.”⁴⁹⁹ I argue that Lynn’s 1966 song undoubtedly “sugar-coats” her dark reality and the pertinent theme of marital rape.

In the 1980 hit film *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, based on Lynn’s autobiography, Lynn’s wedding night has been interpreted by many as a rape scene. Totally unprepared and not voicing consent, Lynn recalls “He really had a time with this little girl he married. He finally more or less had to rip off my panties. The rest of it was kind of a blur. I guess I went into a fit and didn’t know what he was doing. He didn’t tell me nothing, so I just lay there.”⁵⁰⁰ Reading her perceptions through a more contemporary feminist lens, one recognizes this as a narrative of a rape survivor. However, I argue that Lynn upon “growing up” begins to exercise agency, and engages in self-reflection about her personal experiences, which are reflected in her songs.

Her 1967 “Don’t Come Home A Drinkin’ (With Lovin’ on Your Mind)” details a woman’s authoritative stance against her husband who ignores her until he is drunk and looking to have sex with her. While seemingly lighthearted because of the up-tempo delivery and Lynn’s smiling face, this song was being performed when rape within marriage was not yet illegal. In fact, legal structures historically ruled in favor of husbands who were accused of raping their wives.⁵⁰¹ Additionally, Lynn’s lyrics instruct, “Just stay out there on the town and see what you can find / ‘Cause if you want that kind of love well you don’t need none of mine.” These lyrics imply that her husband is free to seek out “lovin’” other women, men, or sex workers “on the town” as long as he leaves her alone. This way, Lynn “talks back” to her husband while

⁴⁹⁹ Deanna D. Sellnow, “Music as Persuasion: Refuting Hegemonic Masculinity in ‘He Thinks He’ll Keep Her’” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 22 (1999): 69.

⁵⁰⁰ Lynn and Vecsey, 51.

⁵⁰¹ Rebecca Ryan, “The Sex Right: A Legal History of the Marital Rape Exemption.” *Law & Society Inquiry* 20 (2006): 941-1001.

simultaneously, she confesses that she misses him terribly. This reveals that she is likely scared of him when he drinks because “liquor and love, they just don’t mix.” In fact, she is so resistant to him, she even suggests cheating rather than coming home, which insinuated that when he seeks “that kind of love,” it is uninhibited and violent. Thus, Lynn’s use of euphemism as “sugar-coating” makes this dark song palatable and rhetorically significant to studies of the comic frame.

Delivered while donning a big smile and the sparkling stage costumes expected of her now established star status, Lynn’s lyrics reveal the dark realities many women face without legal protections from their own husbands. Performing this song in 1966, the same year the National Organization of Women was formed, Lynn insists that “My shows are really geared to women fans, if you think about it.”⁵⁰² In effect, reading this song through the comic frame forces audiences and critics to question the current status quo depicted in Lynn’s lyrics and, as Christiansen and Hanson observe, “prod a reluctant society into recognizing shared values and taking humane action.”⁵⁰³

Moon argues that while not explicitly classed, the use of coded language and euphemism is a salient way to adhere to bourgeois decorum. She writes that “euphemisms work to mask the facts of domination,” rendering them “harmless and sanitized.” Therefore, euphemisms cloak touchy subjects with a veneer of “gentility,” enabling white women to freely express otherwise objectionable discourse.⁵⁰⁴ In a 1978 article in *The Tennessean*, journalist Laura Eipper notes that “Don’t Come Home A Drinkin’” is an instance of Lynn “wryly poking fun.” Yet, Lynn admits that when singing about her past in her personal songs, “I have to kind of joke and laugh

⁵⁰² Lynn and Vecsey, 84.

⁵⁰³ Christiansen and Hanson, 162.

⁵⁰⁴ Moon, 188.

with the things I say between songs to keep my spirits up...when I cry I have to leave the stage.”⁵⁰⁵ Thus, Lynn – in speaking directly to the women in her audiences – highlights the upsetting personal issues that women likely face, but do not discuss openly.⁵⁰⁶ In effect, Lynn communicates with her target audiences, but does so without being detected by men and conservative industry gatekeepers in a rhetorical approach akin to “double consciousness,”⁵⁰⁷ “signifyin(g),”⁵⁰⁸ “discursive skirting,”⁵⁰⁹ and “code-switching.”⁵¹⁰ Furthermore, her upbeat, jubilant performance, which could be interpreted as campy, demonstrates the potential of the comic frame that forces her audience to question their current personal situation by using “laughter rather than tears.”⁵¹¹ Her approach has worked, “Don’t Come Home A Drinkin’” was the first album sung by a woman to make over a \$1 million in sales.⁵¹²

While Lynn has asserted that she once was a “baby,” by 1967 she had developed a combative persona indicative of stereotypes associated with rough, low class women who reject the bourgeois decorum of “good (white) girls.”⁵¹³ Lynn wrote the #1 “Fist City” (1968) in

⁵⁰⁵ Laura Eipper, “Loretta and Sissy,” *The Tennessean* (Aug. 1978).

⁵⁰⁶ Music journalist Laura Eipper recalls her experience at Lynn’s concert where fans were “alternatively laughing and crying (one fan in the front row weeps inconsolably throughout the show). At the end, they’re cheering for more.”⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: McClurg, 1907). Shawn J. Parry-Giles and David S. Kaufer, “Lincoln: The ‘Double Consciousness’ of the Man and the President” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18 (2015): 147-154.

⁵⁰⁸ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 97. Shanara R. Reid-Brinkley, “Mammies and Matriarchs: Feminine Style and Signifyin(g) in Carol Moseley Braun’s 2003-2004 Campaign for Presidency” in *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies*, eds., Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 35-58.

⁵⁰⁹ Linda Mizejewski, “Ellen DeGeneres: Pretty Funny Butch as Girl Next Door” in *Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014), 207.

⁵¹⁰ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981). John Gumperz *Discourse Strategies* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁵¹¹ Jack Babuscio, “The Cinema of Camp (AKA Camp and the Gay Sensibility),” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject – A Reader*, ed., Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 128.

⁵¹² Lynn and Vecsey, 119.

⁵¹³ Moon, 177-97.

response to “a gal in Tennessee who was after [her] man.”⁵¹⁴ Lynn was up almost every night playing clubs, in which she would see routine cases of infidelity. This woman who was attending her shows would be “making eyes” at her husband, so she wrote “You better lay off my man...or I’ll grab you by the hair of your head and lift you off of the ground.” Lynn claims to have actually been in a couple fights in her life and that she fights “like a woman. I scratch and kick and bite and punch. Women are much meaner than men.”⁵¹⁵ So despite her cute persona, Lynn was not a stranger to physical conflict. In fact, “Fist City” was seen as so combative and unfeminine, it was briefly banned from radios.⁵¹⁶ Regardless, it was one of Loretta Lynn’s biggest commercial hits.

“Fist City” offers a narrative that isolates and threatens “the other woman,” which interestingly spurred identification, not derision, between Lynn and her legions of women fans. One might assume that the territorializing, in order to protect her man, may leave audiences jilted. For example, Lynn’s detailing of attacking another woman celebrates “horizontal hostility” – a process when minority group members exercise prejudice against one another, which has the potential to enact “community cannibalism,” due to intragroup derisions.⁵¹⁷ This process, most insidiously, leaves hierarchical oppression intact.⁵¹⁸ For example, by pitting women against each other (e.g. wife vs. other woman), patriarchy (the cheating husband) is often unchallenged. In her song, Lynn warns “If you don’t wanna go to fist city / You better detour around my town” (1968). Lynn continues by stating “the man I love when he picks up trash, he puts it in a garbage can / and that’s what you look like to me and what I see is a pity” (1968).

⁵¹⁴ Lynn and Vecsey, 92.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶Chris Norris, “Good Girl Gone Wild,” *Spin* 20 (2004): 38.

⁵¹⁷ Eric Rofes, “Roots of ‘Horizontal Hostility’ in the Lesbian & Gay Community,” *Gay Community News* 20(1994): 20-23. Horizontal hostility is also known as lateral hostility or lateral violence.

⁵¹⁸ Judith White and Ellen Langer, “Horizontal Hostility: Relations between Similar Minority Groups.” *Journal of Social Issues* 55 (1999): 537-559.

Lynn's lyrics are not only generally demeaning and antagonistic, but evoke specific assumptions about class – by referring to the woman as (low-class) trash. Additionally, Lynn posits that she possesses the town in which she lives (e.g. “my town”), creating an almost draconian authority that is largely incongruous with her customary “colloquial cute” persona. Regardless, Lynn's fans loved this song and women in particular kept requesting it from radio stations despite its brief ban. Women seemingly formed identity through antithesis, recognizing the generic “other woman” as their “common enemy.”⁵¹⁹

By constructing the mythic “other woman,” Lynn's sizable fan base coalesced around a shared “common enemy.” Lynn writes that despite “one nut in every crowd,” women generally like her. In 1978, Lynn had one of the most organized and popular fan clubs in country music history.⁵²⁰ She explains that women

could see I was Loretta Lynn, a mother and a wife and a daughter, who had feelings just like other women. Sure, I wanted men to like me, but the women were something special. They'd come around the bus after the show and they'd ask to talk to me. They felt I had the answers to their problems because my life was just like theirs... [but] Sometimes I think some people were disappointed when they met me and found out I wasn't any smarter or happier than they were... I reach people because I'm with 'em, not apart from 'em.⁵²¹

Here, Lynn explains how her grandiose, antagonisms in songs like “Fist City” (1968) and the racialized, hyperbolic “Your Squaw Is on a Warpath” (1969) make her relatable to fans. This exposes that many women in her audiences recognize, interpret, and comprehend the deeper, “relatable” components of songs that others may dismiss as silly, cute, and innocuous. Thus, by

⁵¹⁹ Lynn and Vecsey, 48.

⁵²⁰ Eipper, “Loretta and Sissy,” 1.

⁵²¹ Lynn and Vecsey, 114.

employing the comic frame in her jovial, humor laced performances, she is able to concomitantly speak to women's communal fears and anxieties.

In an article in *The Tennessean*, Lynn explained why she has developed such a strong identifications to her fans who are women – specifically other poor, rural, white women from “the South.”

You know, I've lived it and I know what they're going through. When I sing it, it may sound funny but I'm singing exactly what they'd like to say but most of 'em can't... They listen to a song and they like it because they don't have the guts to walk up to him and say what they want to... We're all just women together, and that's why there are a lot of women who are my fans.⁵²²

Burke notes that identification occurs through “consubstantiality,” when one “can either crudely imitate one another's actions as revealed on the surface, or subtly imitate the *underlying principles* of such actions” to create community.⁵²³ While Lynn creates identifications and community with women like her, she has also expressed solidarity with Native American communities. In her autobiography, she speaks of her pride for her Cherokee heritage (her mother was Cherokee), and she wishes other “Indians” could feel pride in their culture and identity, rather than the shame imposed by the “white man.”

Lynn and her three closest friends, the Johnson sisters, are “all part Indian,” which has been a salient component of their friendship. In her autobiography, friend Loretta Johnson asks: “How come whenever the white man won it was called a victory, but whenever the Indians won it was called a massacre?” which questions the problematic centrality of whiteness in US history,

⁵²² Eipper, 1.

⁵²³ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 131.

but it does not challenge the “naturalness” of brutal wars.⁵²⁴ Though she is self-conscious about her reading level, Lynn insists she has “read some history books about my Indians to find out what the white man did. I’ve got white history books and red history books – and let me tell you, friends, they tell different stories about the same events.”⁵²⁵ Further, she speaks often about the horrors of the Trail of Tears, which took place not far from her Hurricane Mills, Tennessee ranch. She recalls that “I can almost *feel* and *hear* them squaws and their babies crying.”⁵²⁶

Often framed in media as silent, non-confrontational, and feminized due to their ecofeminist respect for land, Native Americans are simultaneously regarded as violent adversaries in early American narratives.⁵²⁷ Native Americans have been brutalized throughout history, yet Lynn’s 1969 hit “Your Squaw is on a Warpath” not only challenges the silent, passive tropes used to frame Native Americans, but it also speaks of domestic tensions between a “squaw”⁵²⁸ (Native American woman) and her partner or “chief.” Thus, her song both challenges assumptions through the comic frame, by making the “natural” unnatural, as well as situating Native Americans as people with families just like the “white man’s” family. In effect, Lynn continues to hone and adapt her identifications with her audiences by both calling out specificity (e.g. my Indians; poor, silenced women) and general identifications (e.g., friends). Her ability to do so is enhanced by her performances through the comic frame and her mobilization of feminine style.

⁵²⁴ Lynn and Vecsey, 85.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁵²⁷ Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

⁵²⁸ Squaw is also understood as a pejorative term; yet, Lynn uses the term generically and positively as a label for “Indian” women.

5.6 LYNN'S EMPOWERED REBELLIONS: FEMININE STYLE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's noteworthy scholarship on the "feminine style" points out a rhetorical strategy designed to create a space for women rhetors to participate in public discourse.⁵²⁹ Bonnie Dow and Mari Boor Tonn add that examples of feminine style "produce discourse that displays a personal tone, uses personal experience, anecdotes and examples as evidence, exhibits inductive structure, emphasizes audience participation, and encourages identifications between audience and speaker."⁵³⁰ Blankenship and Robson, and others, call for additional analyses of feminine style, as means to attend to the salience of race, class, age, and ethnicity etc. that are often overlooked with traditional explorations of middle class white women.⁵³¹ While Loretta Lynn is not in politics, per se, she is a valuable case study in analysis of feminine style that contributes to discussions of women as rhetors in music from a standpoint (i.e. poor, rural, white women) seldom, if ever, analyzed in feminist critical scholarship.

⁵²⁹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, 2 vols. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

⁵³⁰ Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn, "'Feminine Style' and Political Judgment in the Rhetoric of Ann Richards" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 287.

⁵³¹ Jane Blankenship and Deborah C. Robson, "A 'Feminine Style' in Women's Political Discourse: An Exploratory Essay," *Communication Quarterly* 43 (1995): 353-366. See also Bonnie J. Dow, "Feminism, Difference(s), and Rhetorical Studies," *Communication Studies* 46 (1995): 106-118. Jennifer A. Peeples and Kevin M. DeLuca, "The Truth of the Matter: Motherhood, Community and Environmental Justice," *Women's Studies in Communication* 29 (2006): 59-87. Shanara R. Reid-Brinkley, "Mammies and Matriarchs: Feminine Style and Signifyin(g) in Carol Moseley Braun's 2003-2004 Campaign for Presidency" in *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies*, eds., Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 35-58.

Since her early-1960s “colloquial cute” phase that was entirely reliant on her relationships to paternalistic white men, Lynn “grew up” and adopted a defiant wife persona that largely placated industry gatekeepers and strengthened her fan base. This transition was made possible because of the freedoms afforded to her by the comic frame – her target audience was able to reflect upon their experiences and seek, or at least ponder, change. Simultaneously, her residual childlike, innocence combined with her grandiose “sugar-coated” expressions of violence did not threaten men. However, as the second wave of feminism impacted and mobilized women around the country, Lynn’s rhetorical strategies shift again to reflect upon her own experiential knowledge, which she had historically dismissed, due in part to her insecurities about class, and her lack of traditional education.

Numerous feminist critical scholars have noted the myriad ways that society devalues communicative traits, everyday objects, and concepts imbued with femininity such as motherhood and the “feminized” private sphere.⁵³² This devaluing is linked to lower self-esteem among girls and gender nonconforming youth, as well as the systematic lack of women in leadership roles. However, with the recognition and application of “feminine style,” rhetors can mobilize ethos through innovate channels. In my analysis of Lynn’s second instantiation of rhetorical rebellion, I look specifically at her use of experiential knowledge, inductive reasoning, and identifications with audiences.

In her 1970 #1 hit “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” Lynn shifts her songwriting away from a common enemy (e.g. husband, the “other woman”) to situate herself in her own narrative. Lynn in this shift, is no longer being acted upon by problematic “Others,” she embodies a subject

⁵³² See for example Carole Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A Baxter, “Disciplining the Feminine,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80, (1994): 383-409. For a specific discussion on mothers as a muted group within the devalued private sphere, see Emily Deering Crosby, “A Quiverfull of Mommy Blogs: Ideological Subversion and Reinforcement of Mothering Models Online” (MA Thesis, Indiana University, 2011): 1-110.

position as both creator (i.e. songwriter, performer) and subject of her narrative. Dow and Tonn write that rhetors' use of personal anecdotes and brief narratives spur validation in one's experiences and in the experiences of her audience. This empowerment produces identifications and cohesion among audiences through a sense of shared attributes, qualities, or beliefs. Thus, audiences are transformed from passive receptors to what Campbell calls "agents of change."⁵³³ Like Dolly Parton, Lynn espouses pride in your heritage despite years of shame and insecurity. Lynn writes, "we were poor but we had love, / that's the one thing that daddy made sure of," positing that while Lynn grew up in abject poverty, her home was loving and supportive. Lynn writes that while she wrestled with feelings of shame in her impoverished circumstances, she recognizes that she did the best she could. When making decisions about what was to be depicted in the film about her life, *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), Lynn said:

There were a lot of things we left out [of the film] on purpose. We didn't want to make it too bad because we didn't want nobody to be depressed when they watched the movie. It was a lot sadder than what it looked like on film... we're talking POOR... I never was ashamed of not having an education [because] there was nothin' I could do about it. If there'd a-been something I coulda done about it, then I'd-a been ashamed.⁵³⁴

In this public interview, Lynn admits that many of her predicaments were out of her control. By focusing on what she could control, Lynn asserts that she eventually became proud of her accomplishments. Lynn said that,

Before I was singing, I cleaned house, I took in laundry, I picked berries. I worked seven days a week. I was a housewife and mother for fifteen years before I was an entertainer ... I've grown up and canned things almost every year since I started. When I slow down,

⁵³³ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 74-86.

⁵³⁴ Bufwack and Oermann, 264.

I'll do it again...that's what's real... I know how to survive. Who knows? Tomorrow I may have to. If anything ever happened, I'd go back to that.⁵³⁵

In a culture that often prioritizes men's breadwinning and celebrates hunting prowess, for example, Lynn expresses her abilities as a self-sufficient woman – well versed in feminized domestic labor (e.g. laundry, cleaning) and cultivation of the land (e.g. farming and canning, berry picking). Later in a 1978 interview, Lynn said that “I'd like to slow down now and be with my kids more...stay home and raise my flowers, my garden, and can [vegetables] and sew – things I used to do before I ever got into this business.”⁵³⁶ Thus, she takes pride in knowing how to *survive* – by engaging in “feminized” practices.⁵³⁷ These are powerful sentiments that function as a noteworthy example of feminine style. She conveys the value of survival, literally and figuratively, to the women in her audiences who may feel their experiential knowledge and abilities are systematically devalued amidst patriarchal ideals.

Lynn also shares her pride in her mother's hard work through anecdotes and inductive reasoning. In her anecdotal 1970 lyrics, she writes “Daddy loved and raised eight kids on a miner's pay / Mommy scrubbed our clothes on a washboard ever' day / Why I've seen her fingers bleed / To complain, there was no need / She'd smile in mommy's understanding way.”⁵³⁸ While the song's title, subsequent book and film, are all predicated on Lynn's relationship to her *father*, she prioritizes her mother's contributions to her childhood. As Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles point out, work and occupational achievement are central to men's identity

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Eipper, 1.

⁵³⁷ Spending time with her children, gardening, and sewing

⁵³⁸ Loretta Lynn, “Coal Miner's Daughter” (1970).

in the public sphere.⁵³⁹ Therefore, Lynn's life as a "coal miner's daughter" situates her father's work as a public marker of legibility that likely transcends region and music genre. While audiences do not know his name or that he died of black lung related illness at the age fifty-one, they do know he was a coal miner. In a patriarchal society, men's employment is centralized as a public identity, often rendering stereotypical women's work illegible. By explicitly detailing her mother's hard work (e.g. kind steadfast resolve despite bleeding fingers), she conveys the significance of women's work that is often unpaid, illegible, and culturally undervalued.

Additionally, Lynn emphasizes her father's hard work and loving parenting skills, which destabilizes the tropes of hapless, brutish fathers unable to express emotion. This is particularly salient because it challenges not only dominant masculine imagery that frames fathers as "unnatural" caregivers, but also challenges the stoic, icy cowboy imagery specific to the violent origins of country music. In other words, Lynn – through anecdotal evidence – makes larger claims about gender identity and values. In effect, she extrapolates from particular concrete examples and enacts inductive reasoning, a key component of feminine style.

Finally, through her song "You're Looking at Country," Lynn encourages audience involvement, self-reflection, and points to her burgeoning self-confidence. Lynn's song begins with the line, "Well I like my lovin' done country style and this little girl would walk a country mile / to find her a good ole slow talkin' country boy." She continues by singing, "I'm about as old fashioned as I can be and I hope you're likin' what you see / 'Cause if you're lookin' at me, you're lookin' at country." Here, Lynn is explicitly initiating flirtatious dialogue with an unknown "country boy." That is, she is soliciting a man to look at her, repeating "If your eyes are on me, you're looking at country." These lyrics signify a significant shift in Lynn's

⁵³⁹ Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, "Gendered Politics and Presidential Image Construction: A Reassessment of the 'Feminine Style,'" *Communication Monographs* 63 (1996): 343.

songwriting to embrace a sense of sexual confidence, largely unthinkable in her early career.

Lynn writes that her early sex life

couldn't be much worse. Looking back, I'd say that sex didn't mean that much to me for a long time. I think I picked up the old woman's attitude that sex was fun for men – but not for women. Doo even got me some sex books for me to read, but it wasn't until I was older that I started to enjoy it a little more.⁵⁴⁰

Lynn's "growing up" amidst the second wave of feminism impacted her songwriting and persona. Even though Lynn was around thirty-eight years old when this song was released, she elected to use the terms "little girl" and "country boy." In these suggestive lyrics, Lynn does not stray too far from her "colloquial cute" style, which likely puts her audiences at ease. She writes, "there's a lotta country that you ain't seen / I'll show you around," conveying significant sexual innuendo. Yet she adds at the end of her song, that she will show him only if he "show[s] me a weddin' band," signaling to audiences that she is still playing by the rules of traditional sexual exchange – men want sex and women acquiesce with the promise of marriage. Thus, "marriage became the price for sex."⁵⁴¹ While she adheres to traditional markers of respectability, Lynn's open dialogue encourages audience participation and reflection.

bell hooks writes that the practice of looking is deeply informed by power and authority.⁵⁴² For example, a child is reminded not to stare, yet told to look at speakers when they are talking to them. Therefore, who is allowed to look become a salient question of power. hooks notes that slaves were never allowed to look at masters, ushering in a form of obedience that

⁵⁴⁰ Lynn and Vecsey, 51.

⁵⁴¹ Beth Bailey, "Patsy Cline and the Problem of Respectability," in *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline* ed. Warren Hofstra. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 70.

⁵⁴² bell hooks, "Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in her *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115.

assumes eye-contact to be confrontational. A Lacanian reading of the gaze may be thought of as a look that assails the subject – when one endures the “scrutiny of an externalized anonymous Other.”⁵⁴³ hooks writes that because Black people have been denied the gaze as a subordinate population, the stare became both desirable and dangerous. Therefore, Lynn’s invitation to the “anonymous Other” to look at her is significant.

Women are a historically marginalized group denied the opportunity to gaze. In fact, John Berger argues that “men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.”⁵⁴⁴ Therefore, Lynn’s lyrics “if you’re looking at me, you’re looking at country” changes one’s understanding of this traditional, sexist script. By calling out those who are looking at her, she is not the passive object of their gaze. Rather, she is the self-defining subject who hails the audience and instructs: “you’re looking at country!” Additionally, she claims that “This here country is a little green and there’s a lotta country that you ain’t seen.” Lynn, through innuendo, equates this “green country” with her inexperienced womanhood (i.e. her unadulterated yet sexualized body), which the viewer “ain’t seen” (yet). Thus, by exclaiming “if your eyes are on me, you’re looking at country,” she is commanding control of the gaze that may otherwise control her. In effect, she stares back and implores her audience to look, but reflect on *her* sexual agency that reconfigures their spectatorship. Thus, she destabilizes the “male gaze.”⁵⁴⁵ Her sexually confident persona is a significant departure from the bashful “little lady,” who insisted that she “didn’t know ‘make’ was another word for having sex. I told you, I’m real backward.”⁵⁴⁶ Lynn’s first “militant matrimony” rebellion was testament to her *personal*

⁵⁴³ Henry Krips, “The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Zizek,” *Culture Unbound* 2 (2010): 93.

⁵⁴⁴ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1977): 47

⁵⁴⁵ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed., S. Thornham (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press), 58–69.

⁵⁴⁶ Lynn and Vecsey, 120.

frustrations. Her performances of antagonistic lyrics were interpreted through the comic frame because of her childlike “colloquial cute” performances. Then, her second rebellion showcased the value of feminine style to promote experiential knowledge and self-confidence through anecdotal evidence and audience participation, which only strengthened her loyal, and mostly female, fan base. However, Lynn’s first and second rhetorical rebellions coalesced – merging the comic frame and feminine style to shift her narratives from the private sphere to the public sphere. Lynn no longer challenged her husband or the “other woman” but challenged patriarchy, and her large fan base rallied behind her.

5.7 THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: REBELLION AS FEMINIST THREAT

Lynn’s third and final rhetorical rebellion reflects the confluence of the second wave of feminism by explicitly making the personal political. More specifically, Lynn rhetorical agency stems from her mobilization of “feminine style” combined with her now familiar antagonistic “comic frame” in order to engage and purport feminist sentiments. However, this combination was deemed threatening by industry gatekeepers and deemed rhetorically “too much.” For example, Lynn no longer wrote about her own husband, the generic “other woman,” her own father, or a generic “country boy,” Lynn’s songwriting addressed problems with patriarchy. This era that I have defined as her “personal is political” era demonstrates the clear limits of the country music industry gatekeepers – who are historically unwilling to engage in uncomfortable

political discussions that demand reflection, and correction incited by the comic frame. In what follows, I look at Lynn's 1973 #1 hit "Rated X" and 1975 #5 hit "The Pill," to explore how she mobilized political discourse and endured salient backlash.

When asked about Lynn's success as a top selling, critically acclaimed singer and songwriter in country music, her longtime producer Owen Bradley explained:

She's the spokesperson for ladies... Loretta had a lot of different ideas and they were very fresh... And the women's lib also was coming on at that time [of her rise in popularity]... You have to be in the right place at the right time. And I think Loretta was standing right there.⁵⁴⁷

Bradley notes the connection between "Women's Lib" mobilization and Lynn's popularity; especially when her songs started exploring recognizable second wave feminist issues such as divorce and double standards discussed in "Rated X." Lynn writes in her lyrics, "Divorce is the key to bein' loose and free so you're gonna be talked about / Everybody knows that you've loved once so they think you'll love again." Lynn speaks of the double standard enforced on women who have been divorced and are thus assumed to be sexually available. Lynn notes in her autobiography, "I've heard people say men are bound to run around a little bit. It's their nature. Well, shoot, I don't believe in double standards, where men can get away with things that women can't. In God's eyes, there's no double standard."⁵⁴⁸ By evoking faith and God to challenge double standards, Lynn is adhering to markers of respectability while simultaneously purporting a palatable liberal argument about equality in what Olson may call "reformist" rather

⁵⁴⁷ Bufwack and Oermann, 266. Bradley was also Patsy Cline's producer.

⁵⁴⁸ Lynn and Vecsey, 55.

than “radical” rhetoric.⁵⁴⁹ Hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, is the “culturally idealized form of masculine character” that often naturalizes male legitimacy and dominance over the feminine.⁵⁵⁰ Thus, by claiming that God sees men and women as the same, she challenges men’s “natural” predilections for promiscuity – making the “natural” unnatural, through the comic frame.

The “charitable” comic frame is flexible, adaptive, and a frame of “ambivalence” that allows “people to be observers of themselves.”⁵⁵¹ In “Rated X,” Lynn complains of the double binds imposed on divorced women, she sings “the women all look at you like you’re bad and the men all hope you are.” In this context, Lynn – through euphemistic language of “bad” – calls out both men and women for being complicit in sexist shaming of women. She continues, “if you go too far you’re gonna wear the star of a woman rated X.” Here, Lynn warns women of the pitfalls of the double bind – divorced women are finally free to be “loose” after their marital “mistake,” but if they indulge in sexuality, they will “wear the star.” Her choice of term “star” is loaded with allusion and connotation.⁵⁵² However, the most dominant reference would be a simple star as badge or asterisk, to denote aberration; this person stands out. Further, “X” could allude to “ex” as in former lover, “ex-wife.” Also, “X” may be the literal mark on spoiled food or rejected items

⁵⁴⁹ Lester C. Olson, “Intersecting Audiences: Public Commentary Concerning Audre Lorde’s Speech, ‘Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,’” in *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices in Communication Studies*, eds., Karma Chávez and Cindy Griffin (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 125-146.

⁵⁵⁰ R. W. Connell, “An Iron Man: the Body and Some Contradictions of Hegemonic Masculinity,” in *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, eds., Michael Messner and Don Sabo (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books, 1990), 93.

⁵⁵¹ Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes towards History*, 171.

⁵⁵² At first listen, I was convinced Lynn was saying “scar,” which makes sense to me since it alludes to the violent underpinnings of country music and the assumed violence between “low class” women. One cannot remove a scar in this context because it is permanent. However, “star” may allude to how Nazis marked Jews with the Star of David as inferior and a threat, aligning with the tragic frame. It also functions akin to the “scarlet letter A” but in the form of an “X.” However, I am not convinced that Lynn, who claims to not read very well, was alluding to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1850 literary work. Rather, we put stars next to noteworthy things – for good or for bad; they stand out.

that are to be discarded. Lastly, the “X” may connote pornography, often marked as XXX; she is illicit – desirable yet dangerous. This song may be exactly what Bradley meant when he said that Lynn had very different, “fresh” ideas.⁵⁵³

Another fresh idea developed by Lynn was offering speaking commentary at the end of her songs during her mid-1970s “personal is political” era. Upon the ending of her studio recorded “Rated X” song, she states: “That’s why us women don’t have a chance...’cause if you’ve been married you can’t have no fun at all. You’re rated X. No matter what you do.” Then the music and audio trail off. By speaking to her audience as “us women [sic]” she reveals her target audience and highlights that “we” as women (e.g. wives, divorcees, mistresses, exes, virgins etc.) “don’t have a chance.” Through her lyrics and commentary, Lynn is forcing her audience to see, name, and challenge the sexist hypocrisy that instructs: “you can’t have a male friend if you’re a has-been.”

Even more telling was the commentary Lynn offered after a televised performance of “Rated X” on the country music variety show *Hee Haw*. As the band plays, she harangues:

Yeah if you’d been a married woman and divorced, you’re gonna be talked about no matter what you do. People are gonna look down their noses, but I don’t know what to tell ya. Women – we’re rated X.⁵⁵⁴

As she speaks, Lynn performatively raises her arm and shrugs, implying that this double standard and imposed “choices” of the double bind ensures that women are damned. By coining the concept of “Rated X,” Lynn is speaking to “the problem that has no name.” Without explicitly

⁵⁵³ In fact, Lynn’s noteworthy style caught the attention of writer Joan Tewkesbury and filmmaker Robert Altman, who based a character played by actress Ronee Blakley after Lynn in their 1975 satirical musical-comedy film *Nashville*.

⁵⁵⁴ Accessed February 9, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9kJgSPrd_8

voicing feminist sentiments, Lynn speaks through colloquial, “sugar-coated,” language to highlight social problems. She does not voice the tragic frame, in which she seeks violent revenge or the expunging of men, rather she tells the audience “I don’t know what to tell ya” positing that perhaps they have the answer. Thus, through self-reflection and *correction* rather than punishment, audiences can promote feminist behaviors to answer Lynn’s “call.” But Lynn’s political sentiments came at a price.

The only televised recording of Lynn performing “Rated X” is on *Hee Haw*. It was posted in 2012 by a layperson – who recorded it off of a television screen. Supposedly, this recording of Lynn was so controversial it was edited out of the show that aired. The applause at the end of the show was prominent; but it was not unilaterally enthusiastic as other responses to her televised performances are. The clapping was hesitant and jolting – signally a moment of uncertainty and potential discomfort among her audience. Interestingly, Lynn began her career as a “little lady” who was talked *about* by paternalistic white male hosts. However, by 1973, Lynn was a country music star afforded the freedom to speak off-script. Yet, she was swiftly censored judging by the lack of available recordings of her singing this song, either in Nashville archives or online. This example exposes the salient limits imposed on her as a controversial, subversive rhetor.

Lynn, however, was not done making controversial, feminist songs. In 1975, Lynn climbed the charts with “The Pill.” Unlike all the other Loretta Lynn hits I have analyzed, “The Pill” was not written by Lynn and it was not a #1 song. “The Pill” details the defiant tone of an emancipated wife now in possession of the birth control pill. Lynn recorded this song in 1972, but it was held back by her MCA music label until 1975. This significant detail highlights the impact of the second wave of feminism, as her label viewed 1975 as more hospitable to

narratives about contraception and sexuality – especially in the conservative, whitewashed, male-dominated country music industry. However, so many radio stations banned the song for its content, that it peaked at #5 – a somewhat unusual outcome for such a popular song by such a popular artist. Yet, one can recognize how gatekeepers exercise their power to thwart distribution of particular narratives. Despite the backlash, Lynn expressed deep pride in the song and the argument it makes.

She recalls in her autobiography that she used humor to mask the desperation and upset she often felt as such a young mother. She writes that

sometimes in my show I make a joke about how I stopped having babies every year: “I keep my legs crossed now instead of my fingers.” But it wasn’t funny back then. I was so ignorant, and women didn’t have what they do today. I love my kids, but I wish they had the pill when I was first married. I didn’t get to enjoy the first four kids, I had ‘em so fast. I was too busy trying to feed ‘em and put clothes on ‘em.⁵⁵⁵

While Lynn is careful not to insinuate that she resents her children and her lack of control over and knowledge of her body, she is expressing anecdotal evidence rendering the personal a political, *collective* issue. She recalls that after she had her second baby around the age of sixteen, she had two miscarriages – one of which almost killed her from blood poisoning. But she laments that “I kept on getting pregnant, though.” With her third child she was told by doctors that she needed a cesarean; however,

I was still a minor and I couldn’t sign my own consent, even though I already had two babies. They needed Doo’s signature, but he was off in the woods on a logging job...for three days [they] kept me under medicine...But finally I had the baby the regular way.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ Lynn and Vecsey, 62.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

Unfortunately, these narratives – while necessary to be spoken and shared as a form of “consciousness raising” – are not that uncommon given the androcentric priorities of the field of medicine and the lack of advocacy available to (young) mothers.⁵⁵⁷ By using her own experience as concrete examples, Lynn harnesses inductive feminine style that was combined with the comic frame evident in her song “The Pill.”

Lynn writes that because of her isolating and overwhelming experiences as a teen mother, she is “so proud of my song ‘The Pill.’” It was her biggest selling record of 1975. She states that “I really believe in those words. It’s all about how the man keeps the woman barefoot and pregnant over the years. I think it’s great that women have a way of protecting themselves now, without worrying about the man.”⁵⁵⁸ She agreed with MCA’s decision to hold the song “figuring people weren’t ready to accept it. [But] when we released it, the people loved it. I mean the *women* loved it. But the men who run the radio stations were scared to death.” Lynn adds, in her 1976 biography that “the men have enough things going for ‘em in life. We women have got to stick together.”⁵⁵⁹ By explicitly pointing out the significance of difference and the gender hierarchy, Lynn adopts a more politically charged feminist stance that is different from other

⁵⁵⁷ I wonder what might have happened if Lynn did not have an adult in her life to sign for her, exposing the presumption that a teen mother has an adult and male to speak for her.

⁵⁵⁸ I find it noteworthy that Lynn frames the birth control pill as “protection,” which makes it a palatable, necessary resource akin to how people champion gun ownership. Rather, one could frame access to the pill as a “right” demanded for bodily autonomy, hormonal stability, and control over one’s assumed (hetero)sexuality; however, Lynn refers to it as “protection” – despite its inability to protect against STDs and infection. This combative language, I argue, resonates with her rural conservative fans who likely respond to language affiliated with confrontational, masculine paradigms that tout “protection.” Also, she uses the phrase “without worrying about the man,” which points out that she is conscious of men’s role in this narrative and works to not explicitly alienate them. Yet she recognizes them as a possible threat to women’s autonomy. She does not want to “worry” about the man who may feel he is losing control over “his” woman’s sexuality, procreative potential, and the legal claim over kin. But also, she does not want to inconvenience him with condoms or refraining from sex – women can take the pill without having to worry about men’s discomfort, retaliatory violence, or antifeminist backlash. Despite the fact that women are the ones who will be impacted the most by (in)accessibility to contraception, Lynn resituates the conversation to placate men. This accommodating phrase highlights how Lynn “sugar-coats” narratives in order to exist and thrive within an androcentric medical climate, conservative antifeminist music genre, and patriarchal US culture that routinely exercises control over women’s bodies, yet will not entertain the idea of limiting gun possession, which is analogously and ironically touted as a “right” for “protection.”

⁵⁵⁹ Lynn and Vecsey, 84.

defiant sentiments such as invoking God to reject unfair double standards. Thus, Lynn's feminist sentiments about "The Pill" and men's systemic advantages threatened the status quo in country music. In effect, radios attempted to ban Lynn's music, via the tragic frame, to resist engaging feminist incursion.

Lynn continued espousing feminist sentiments after men tried to censor "The Pill." She writes that

See, they'll play a song about making love in a field because that's sexy, from a man's point of view. But something that's really important to women, like birth control, they don't want no part of, leastways not on the air...Some preachers criticized it in church – but that just did me a favor by making the people more curious.⁵⁶⁰

Lynn's use of humor regarding preachers giving her free publicity enacts the comic frame to force audiences to grapple with how men try to silence things that are "really important to women." Rather than demand radio station disc jockeys be fired or boycotted, she explicitly spoke out about the way censorship spurs curiosity. In other words, tragedy leads to punishment, "the comic leads to dialectic" and Lynn's song got people talking.⁵⁶¹ Many of the people talking were outside the country music genre. Ironically, Lynn's most "unpopular" song among conservative industry gatekeepers was by far her most popular record, reaching #70 on the "Billboard Hot 100." She even voiced support of abortion, which opened up her music to a far larger fan base that irritated country music insiders.

Sellnow argues that music can be employed by marginalized groups as means to persuade nonmembers to accept complex and even controversial claims through the dynamic musical

⁵⁶⁰ Lynn and Vecsey, 62.

⁵⁶¹ Dustin Bradley Goltz, "Perspectives by Incongruity: Kenneth Burke and Queer Theory," *Genders Online Journal* 45 (2007): para. 18.

interactions.⁵⁶² Lynn undoubtedly “converted” antifeminist women to at least consider, perhaps privately, their role in the feminist movement. In a 1975 *Tennessean* interview, Lynn shares that despite her song’s ban,

Women is the ones who go up and put the money in the jukebox and play the songs. But when they come to the show, they usually bring their husband. The husband then realizes that we’re catching up with them. I kinda think the girls is waiting to hear this and say, “Hey you, listen to this song. This is what’s going to happen to you if you don’t straighten up.”⁵⁶³

Thus, women were using Lynn’s songs to encourage self-reflection among men (i.e. husbands) in the audience, in order to spur meaningful dialogue about sexism, birth control, and women’s liberation. Yet in response to the outpouring of support for Lynn from women and other music genres, country music’s gatekeepers were willing to impede Lynn’s popularity through censorship, in order to control Lynn’s message – exposing that gatekeepers were prioritizing the maintenance of sexist patriarchy over profits.

Despite Lynn’s overt support of feminist issues such as destigmatizing divorce, (heterosexual) agency, and legal access to the pill and abortion, Lynn was careful to negotiate her image. While advocating for the rights of others, she routinely distanced herself from these feminist rights. She confesses:

I’m glad I had six kids because I couldn’t imagine my life without ‘em. But I think a woman needs control over her own life, and the pill is what helps her do it. [Women and girls] “should have a choice instead of leaving it up to some politician or doctor who

⁵⁶² Deanna D. Sellnow, “Music as Persuasion: Refuting Hegemonic Masculinity in ‘He Thinks He’ll Keep Her,’” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 22 (1999): 68.

⁵⁶³ Staff Writer, “Can’t Say It on the Radio,” *The Tennessean*, Nashville Public Library Archives, (1975).

don't have to raise the baby. I believe they should be able to have an abortion...I don't think I could have an abortion. It would be wrong for me.⁵⁶⁴

Lynn insists that she would not engage in these feminist victories. She also notes that her husband got “snipped” (had a vasectomy) and that she, in actuality, only used the pill to regulate her menstruation, which tempered her potentially threatening feminist convictions.

Another way Lynn distanced herself from political controversy and tempered her subversive sentiments was through the comic frame in “The Pill.” She sings, “this incubator is overused because you’ve kept it filled / the feeling good comes easy now since I’ve got the pill.”⁵⁶⁵ These lyrics strategically refer to Lynn as a chicken who is tired of being impregnated by the rooster. By framing Lynn as an animal, the songwriters make the narrative more palatable and humorous. By dehumanizing the issue through barnyard metaphors and an upbeat tune, Lynn and her producers likely assumed the song would be less antagonistic and threatening. However, in a few lines of the song, Lynn is again a woman (not a hen) who is throwing her maternity dress in the garbage in favor of “miniskirts hot pants and a few fancy frills / Yeah I’m making up for all those years since I’ve got the pill.” I argue that these terms, read through terministic screens, signal feminine defiance and untethered sexuality.

Miniskirts and hot pants connote youth, sexual freedom, and more importantly – urban progress ushered in by “women’s lib.” This shift is particularly noteworthy because in Lynn’s 1973 hit “You’re Looking at Country,” she wrote that “you don’t see no city when you look at me ‘cause country’s all I am.” Yet, in 1975, Lynn is adopting not only the arguments of

⁵⁶⁴ Lynn and Vecsey, 62.

⁵⁶⁵ Like Ann Richards’s use of “birdlegs” (Dow and Tonn, 1993) to reference her self-conscious childlike self, Lynn similarly employs the label of a “hen” to speak of her former oppressed self. This could spur a future area of research in how women employ “aliases” or metaphoric references to themselves as a way to free themselves from sexist constraints that limit their success as public speakers, politicians, and musicians etc.

progressive feminists, but their fashion as well. Thus, I argue that “The Pill” was controversial for her conservative patriarchal industry because it specifically signals an end to rural, barefoot, pregnant women as “hens on nursery hill.” Instead, these naïve “colloquial cute” “girls” are becoming feminists attracted to the industrialized and diverse (i.e., nonwhite) city with the disposable income to buy hot pants and “fancy frills.” Thus by attending to the intersections of the lyrical narrative (e.g. class, region, sexuality, gender, race), the song is destabilizing to her audience on many fronts and provokes a myriad of anxieties about change.

Further, Lynn does not say “I’m on the pill” or “I’m seeking the pill” or “I’m going to choose when to have my next baby,” she says she has “got” the pill. Her triumphant tone is antagonistic as if say “gotcha!”⁵⁶⁶ to patriarchy and the fun-loving men who exploit women as dehumanized “incubators.” With the pill, she is shutting down her former way of life, triggering audience reflection to ponder the toll of consecutive pregnancies on women’s bodies – especially in regions with historically large families of eight to twelve children. Most saliently, the antagonism triggers men’s anxieties about losing control of women. By employing feminine style, using anecdotal evidence and self-disclosure, as well as the comic frame, to encourage contemplation and correction, Lynn was rejected by country music gatekeepers, showing the limits imposed on women in country music that is residually evident today.

Despite Lynn’s sizable influence as a feminist presence in country music, Lynn recoiled in her overt antisexist sentiments. Following the backlash from “The Pill,” Lynn said that “I’m not a big fan of Women’s Liberation, but maybe it will help women stand up for the respect they’re due.” Here, she evades explicit identifications with Women’s Liberation as perhaps an

⁵⁶⁶ Also, she’s got the pill and in a recognizable cliché threatens that she is not afraid to use it. This incites fear of the threat. She may not have taken the pill yet – but she *can*. Such as “I got a secret” or “I got the key” – it implies *potential* to enact agency. Perhaps she has not taken the pill yet, and her “rooster” can persuade her not to.

exercise in internalized misogyny or a way to strategically distance herself from political discourse and placate men in the industry who have the potential to foil her career. This sidestepping and resistance to identifying as a feminist is not uncommon among women today – especially in country music. Music journalist Beverly Keel notes that since women in this male-dominated music industry have to fight to get good songs and “share the bill with men, they certainly [aren’t] going to risk everything to sing a song of feminism.”⁵⁶⁷ Therefore, many contemporary women in country music have reverted back to a kind of apolitical country music that conflates “vengeful women” with empowerment, and in turn, promulgates the limited tragic frame. In effect, women in country music name an isolated scapegoat and seek revenge upon him, rather than pointing out the cultural parameters that often lead to problematic norms and behaviors. However, country music is not the only medium that seeks apolitical comfort in the tragic frame. News outlets, audiences, and political figures often collectively retreat to the comfort of the tragic frame, when exposed to traumatic national events.

⁵⁶⁷ Keel, “Between Riot Grrrl and Quiet Girl,” 160.

⁵⁶⁷ Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1935), 90.

5.8 TODAY'S APOLITICAL COUNTRY: RESISTING FEMINISM WITH THE TRAGIC FRAME

In their analysis of the media coverage of Matthew Shepard's murder, Ott and Aoki argue that Burke's concept of "terministic screens" allows rhetorical critics to recognize how stories are constructed via the tragic frame.⁵⁶⁸ In *The Grammar of Motives*, Burke points out that criminals, whether they are real or imaginary, "serve as scapegoats in a society that 'purifies itself' by 'moral indignation' in condemning them."⁵⁶⁹ Thus, Shepard's murderers were "othered" as heinous, uncivilized, and evil, and were then alienated from society. As explored earlier in this chapter, tragedy "demands condemnation and penance," yet rarely does it demand additional societal change.⁵⁷⁰ For example, hate-crime legislation was proposed following Shepard's murder, since Shepard was targeted for being gay, yet the national legislation largely failed.⁵⁷¹ After Adam Lanza committed mass murder at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, activists arose demanding gun restrictions to those with severe mental illness, yet no gun restriction legislations were ultimately passed.⁵⁷² Rather, Stanza was framed as a deranged "lone

⁵⁶⁸ Brian Ott and Eric Aoki, "The Politics of Negotiating Public Tragedy: Media Framing of the Matthew Shepard Murder," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5 (2002), 485.

⁵⁶⁹ Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 406.

⁵⁷⁰ Brummett, "Burkean Comedy," 219.

⁵⁷¹ Ott and Aoki, 485.

⁵⁷² Interestingly, Lanza's mass shooting was not deemed a hate crime even though I argue it was violence against women. Lanza murdered six women, twelve girls, and eight boys. I argue that Lanza (killing eighteen females, over double the number of boys murdered), targeted women specifically – since elementary schools are routinely a "feminized" and "maternal" space filled with women – rarely many other men. In effect, the

wolf” unlike the rest of rational (white, male) society. After Dylann Roof murdered nine Black churchgoers in the mass shooting in Charleston in 2015; the murderer was sentenced to prison, the Confederate Flag was removed from the State Capital and little substantive discussion about escalating white supremacy and anti-Black terrorism has been generated. In other words, with the scapegoating of the perpetrator, society is cleansed, restored, and not held accountable for the systemic structures (e.g. toxic masculinity, racism, misogyny, domestic terrorism) that allows for the tragic event. Moreover, the tragic frame hinders social progress. It creates “a world of absolutes, which commonly results in a language of sacrifice, victimage, and violence” that ignores cultural anxieties and taboo desires that fueled these brutal murders.⁵⁷³ The tragic frame allows audiences to be freed from guilt and reflection, spurring apolitical sentiments. Contemporary country music has departed from the productive comic frame of Loretta Lynn to return to the *tragic* murderess ballad in a dominant trope I call the “vengeful woman.”

Contemporary country music star Miranda Lambert came to prominence as a singer and songwriter in 2005 with her popular #1 debut country music album *Kerosene*, after placing third in the singing competition *Nashville Star* in 2003.⁵⁷⁴ Her career as a young songwriter and talented guitarist is significant, and akin to Loretta Lynn, because very few artists in contemporary country music write their own songs and few women play the guitar. Another parallel between Lambert and Lynn is both came to prominence through rhetorical rebellions, touting violent antagonisms. However, their musical antagonisms created significantly different effects.

victimology, while innocent and sympathetic, was not interrogated by news media along intersections of gender, race, and age.

⁵⁷³ Michael Butterworth, “The Passion of the Tebow: Sports Media and Heroic Language in the Tragic Frame,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30 (2013): 20.

⁵⁷⁴ The top song from this album, “Kerosene,” details a woman’s plot to kill her cheating lover by burning down his house, which has been “soaked” in kerosene.

From the onset of her career, the white, blonde, and traditionally beautiful Lambert constructed a persona as a tough, desexualized agent, donning ripped jeans, white tank tops, and an attitude that resisted acquiescing to passive femininity often demanded by country music labels. In her 2007 sophomore album *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Lambert carved out a space of “female empowerment” by constructing the contemporary popular trope of the “vengeful woman” persona. I include this contemporary trend of the “vengeful woman” trope as way to signal how the “fresh” ideas introduced and made famous by Loretta Lynn’s rhetorical rebellions have been reimagined in a way that promotes apolitical, tragic frames in contemporary country music as means to promulgate ambivalent feminist empowerment. Coulthard, in her analysis of the violence depicted in contemporary film, points out how violent women are often read through their assumed connections to feminism.⁵⁷⁵ However, these “feminist” narratives in popular culture are in fact indicative of postfeminist anxieties about politically disruptive women.⁵⁷⁶ Thus, rendering vengeful women’s agency as “superficial markers of power,” they are specious, ephemeral, celebrations that actually restore the postfeminist status quo.⁵⁷⁷

In the title track “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend,” Lambert promotes music that audiences can understand as an example of the tragic frame. She writes

Well I started throwin’ things and I scared folks half to death / I got up in his face and smelled whiskey on his breath / Didn’t give a second thought to being thrown in jail / ‘Cause baby to a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

In her other top hit from this album “Gunpowder and Lead,” Lambert sings that she

⁵⁷⁵ Lisa Coulthard, “Killing Bill: Rethinking Feminism in Film Violence,” in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 153-75.

⁵⁷⁶ This reductionist framing assumes that feminist women are violent and violent women are feminist; and by this “logic,” domesticated antifeminist women are safe and unthreatening.

⁵⁷⁷ Coulthard, 173.

is going home, gonna load my shotgun / Wait by the door and light a cigarette / If he wants a fight well now he's got one / and he ain't seen me crazy yet...His fist is big but my gun's bigger / He'll find out when I pull the trigger.

This vivid description of a woman's plot to seek revenge against an abusive lover (who the audience is invited to think is Lambert herself) is significant for two reasons. First, she incorporates "fist" as Lynn did in her threatening song "Fist City" (1968), yet ups the ante by challenging her abuser's fist with her shotgun – making Lynn's "violent" antagonism seem all the more "cute." Second, this song is not about warning a rival within the comic frame; it is about murdering a generic male "Other" who must be expunged from society. Yet, simultaneously she admits that she is "crazy." Thus, both characters in Lambert's song are contained by the tragic frame (i.e. he is killed; she is scapegoated as crazy) and the apolitical, postfeminist status quo is maintained. In other words, Lambert revives the murderess ballad through her performance as the "vengeful woman," but does so without the comic frame as comic corrective. In effect, Lambert reifies problematic stereotypes about women as hysterical and conflates violence against men as empowerment for girls and women.

Amidst Lambert's rise to fame and widespread critical acclaim,⁵⁷⁸ another young, white blonde singer also rose to prominence. Carrie Underwood has become one of the most successful country music stars, as a seven-time Grammy winner. Like Lambert, Underwood came to prominence through the visibility of the singing competition show, winning *American Idol* in 2005.⁵⁷⁹ Underwood is lauded for her hyperfeminine, wholesome image (she is married, Christian, and a mother), which contrasts Lambert's tough and gritty aesthetic (she is divorced

⁵⁷⁸ Lambert has been nominated for twelve Grammys, won two Grammys, and is the winner of seven consecutive Academy of Country Music Female Vocalist of the Year titles, which is an industry record.

⁵⁷⁹ It is worth noting how television has been a key resource for many talented women who have mobilized this medium as a gateway into the music industry. This could become a potential site of further scholarship.

and not a mother). However, these women have much in common when looking at their extremely popular contemporary “vengeful woman” persona, which has resurrected the tragic frame.

Underwood’s career shifted to darker topics with 2007’s hit “Before He Cheats.” Written by two men, this song details a woman’s vengeful destruction of her cheating lover’s pickup truck, which is coded as a stand-in for his white, rural masculinity.⁵⁸⁰ She sings “I carved my name into his leather seat / I took a Louisville slugger to both head lights / slashed a hole in all four tires / Maybe next time he’ll think before he cheats.” This vivid imagery not only reinforces the theme Lambert makes famous in her album *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, but it shows a different kind of invasive, torturous rage in the form of property violence that often leads to physical violence.⁵⁸¹ This passive aggressive form of violence also reveals her lack of direct confrontation through communication. In other words, she and Lambert are not agents who use their *voices* as a tool to spur reflection. Rather, they use guns and baseball bats to enact a form of “justice” within the tragic frame.

Underwood’s first cautionary tale “Before He Cheats” acts as a gateway for her as she transitions from a “country sweetheart” to a “vengeful woman.” Specifically, in 2013 she embodied dark, controversial characters in her hit songs: “Two Black Cadillacs,” which explains the plotting of a wife and mistress who tortuously kill the man who lied to both of them, and “Blown Away” that tells the story of an abused daughter leaving her drunk, passed-out father to die in a tornado as she absconds to the storm cellar. The “vengeful woman” in these songs, in contrast to her “good (white) girl” public identity, invites the audience to champion these violent

⁵⁸⁰ Aaron A. Fox, “‘Alternative’ to What? O Brother, September 11, and the Politics of Country Music,” in *Country Music Goes to War*, eds. Charles Wolfe and James Akenson, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 185.

⁵⁸¹ Simon, “Domestic Violence,” 1107-1124.

women who name the abhorrent “scapegoats in a society that ‘purifies itself’ by ‘moral indignation’ in condemning them.”⁵⁸²

My analysis is of particular relevance because like Lynn, both Lambert and Underwood distance themselves from feminism and refuse to identify as feminists. In fact, many artists, politicians, and other prominent women resist the loaded label of “feminist,” because of effective backlash campaigns enacted in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably by antifeminist Phyllis Schlafly. Scholars have often labeled these women reluctant feminists – women who clearly share in feminist ideals or embody them, but resist identifying as feminists often because of fear of stigmatization, ignorance of the movements that made their success possible, and the threat of losing privileges.⁵⁸³ For example, in a 2012 interview with *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Underwood confessed that “I wouldn’t go so far as to say I am a feminist – that can come off as a negative connotation. But I am a strong female.”⁵⁸⁴ Jon Caramanica, in a 2010 *New York Times* review of Miranda Lambert’s tour, claims that she not only promotes a unique style of “justice” in her empowering songs, but that “a concert by Ms. Lambert is a theatre of rural feminism, principled and flexible.”⁵⁸⁵ What Caramanica signals is an interesting trend in which feminism is offered with adjectives – as if a “theatre” of “*rural* feminism” is somehow ideologically different than an imagined “theatre” of “*urban* feminism.” Feminist ambivalence is evident in his indistinct description of her brand of feminism as “principled and flexible.” This coded language to signify and reveal assumptions about identity (e.g. whiteness, heterosexuality, region, class, politics etc.)

⁵⁸² Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 406.

⁵⁸³ Sarah Kane, “Cool Britannia’s Reluctant Feminist” in *Thatcher & After: Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture*, eds. Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010)

⁵⁸⁴ Michelle Ruiz, “A Handy Guide to Celebrity Feminists” *Cosmopolitan* (March 8, 2013), accessed May 2014 <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/celebs/news/g2956/celebrity-feminists/slide-13>

⁵⁸⁵ Jon Caramanica, “Shotgun Justice Served with a Strut” *New York Times* (Oct. 1. 2010), accessed May 2014 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/02/arts/music/02lambert.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=Miranda%20Lambert&st=cse&

aligns with the creation of the phrase “conservative feminism” recently touted by White House advisor Kellyanne Conway.⁵⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

Underwood and Lambert, as marketable and powerful stars of today’s country music, have the potential, and perhaps the responsibility, to disrupt the apolitical status of country music narratives. While they have a right and perhaps the industry-required tact to resist feminism, I argue that if they misappropriate feminist ideology as fodder for their “vengeful women” personae, they should interrogate their motives – especially given the consistently sexist climate of contemporary country music. Executive Keith Hill, who oversees 300 country music stations, said in a 2015 interview:

If you want to make ratings in country radio, take the females out...The expectation is we’re principally a male format with a smaller female component. Trust me, I play great female records, and we’ve got some right now; they’re just not the lettuce in our salad.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁶ Aaron Blake, “Kellyanne Conway’s Uniquely Feminist Opposition to Feminism” *The Washington Post* (Feb. 23, 2017), accessed February 2017 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/02/23/kellyanne-conways-uniquely-feminist-opposition-to-feminism/?utm_term=.ad2d3834e44b

⁵⁸⁷ Keith Hill, “On Music and Scheduling” *Country Aircheck, Weekly* (May 26, 2015), <https://www.countryaircheck.com/pdfs/current052615.pdf>

Blatantly sexist, condescending, and a key industry gatekeeper, Hill exposes how the country music industry is still an “Old Boys” network. This is the same network that explicitly instructs disc jockeys at radio stations not to play two women’s songs consecutively, in fear of supposedly upsetting and alienating their audiences, despite no evidence to support this sexist myth.⁵⁸⁸ Irrespective of female country stars’ exploding record sales and massive concert appeal, country music radio stations do not play women’s music regularly in an attempt to maintain the myth of what Hill calls “a male format.”

Theodor Adorno notes that art functions to construct society; therefore, when gatekeepers restrict women’s public discourse and their music, it has salient impacts. For example, by assuming female audiences do not like nor respond to female country music singers, industry gatekeepers negate the rich history of country music as a genre that made women’s narratives available to poor, silenced, disenfranchised women audiences. Clearly industry insiders choose to ignore the legions of women who loyally follow country music’s legendary women such as Lynn. Further, by promulgating the myth that country music is a “male format,” women are systematically shut out of decision making roles, are stripped of bargaining clout, and are denied leadership roles on “Music Row” – the powerful industry avenue in Nashville. Also, women’s narratives are relegated to periphery status, occupying the margins, and dismissed as “niche,” which re-centers men’s narratives as worthwhile, hierarchically superior, and natural. This has the potential to reinscribe women as a muted group.⁵⁸⁹ Lastly, because women are perceived as “tokens” to be sprinkled in as accoutrements in the “salad” of country music, women may see

⁵⁸⁸ Beverly Keel, “Sexist ‘Tomato’ Barb Launches Food Fight on Music Row” *The Tennessean* (May 27, 2015), accessed June 2015. <http://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/2015/05/27/sexist-tomato-barb-launches-food-fight-music-row/28036657/>

⁵⁸⁹ Cheris Kramarae, *Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1981). Cheris Kramarae, “Muted Group Theory and Communication: Asking Dangerous Questions,” *Women & Language* 18 (2005), 55-61.

other token women as competitors rather than allies. This competition may foment intensified horizontal hostility that leaves the “Old Boys” network intact. In effect, women’s narratives are systematically silenced by gatekeepers, enacting a form of violence on the words of women.

Because of this blatant industry sexism and its effects, women in contemporary country music should be wary of adopting the apolitical tragic frame that has encumbered women’s success in country music, since “playing by the rules” does not endorse empowerment or ensure commercial success.⁵⁹⁰ Rather, contemporary musicians could look to icons like Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, and Bobbie Gentry who took politically rich feminist stands despite the sexist culture of country music.

Moreover, the “vengeful women” trope should not be conflated with feminist agency, since these celebratory narratives of “justice” promulgate the postfeminist status quo. In other words, women in country music – attempting to appease industry gatekeepers and accrue privileges as idealized “good (white) girls” – are unwilling or unable to voice politicized sentiments that could revolutionize this music genre. This is especially problematic amidst the rise of “bro-country,” a contemporary subgenre that functions as a safe space for apolitical white masculinity, which I discuss in the concluding chapter.

Often dismissed as conservative, white, outdated, revisionist and irrelevant, country music as the most popular music genre in the United States has the untapped potential to shift discussions of feminism in the direction of progress. Perhaps as more influential women and men identify as feminists, we can collectively turn back the tide of antifeminism enacted by campaigns that imbued gender equality with negative connotation.

⁵⁹⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Edinburgh, Scotland: A&C Black, 1973).

In this chapter, I traced the violent roots of what is now called “country music” to point out how the murder ballad, as an example of Burke’s tragic frame, poses rhetorical limits. Then, through an analysis of Lynn’s comic frame and feminine style, I helped to explain her striking identifications with her devoted female fans and her powerful popularity that extended beyond the limits of the country music genre. By looking to Lynn’s more overt feminist arguments in the mid-1970s, I highlighted the limits imposed by industry gatekeepers, which are largely still existent today. By including a brief discussion of the careers of country contemporaries Miranda Lambert and Carrie Underwood, I touch on the apolitical and postfeminist “vengeful woman” trope as a marker of the rhetorical limits imposed on women in this still deeply sexist music genre. My analysis aims to point out how rhetorical analyses of country music’s legendary second wave women can not only contribute to scholarly feminist rhetorical discourse but illuminate the shortcomings of today’s deeply powerful country music industry, which has the potential to mobilize meaningful political activism and emancipatory feminist convictions.

6.0 CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The Dixie Chicks are the biggest selling women's band of all time.⁵⁹¹ They rank #9 in US country record sales behind country greats Garth Brooks, Willie Nelson, and Reba McEntire, despite being much younger than these seasoned performers. The white and blonde trio, comprised of lead singer Natalie Maines and sisters Martie Maguire and Emily Robison, hails from Dallas, Texas and emerged as one of the most dominant internationally popular country groups of all time. Unlike crossover pop star Shania Twain, this band plays mostly traditional country music, accompanied by customary Appalachian instruments such as fiddles and banjos. However, their musical and lyrical talent fuses pop, bluegrass, and alternative country, demonstrating their ability to appeal across region and genre. Their substantive lyrics include historical tropes of southern identity, romantic themes, mourning loss, as well as an antagonistic sense of humor, earning them recognition as not simply a "girl group" but a talented band that helped reinvigorate country music's indistinguishable sound. Bill Malone recalled that they were a welcome addition to the industry because not only did they inject much hard country material into their performances, they also attracted hosts of young women to their shows.⁵⁹² With a

⁵⁹¹ Jim Casey, "The 20 Top-Selling Country Acts of All Time," *Nashville Country Daily* (Jan. 6, 2017), accessed January 14 2017, <http://www.nashcountrydaily.com/2017/01/06/the-20-top-selling-country-acts-of-all-time-whos-bringing-home-the-bacon-and-frying-it-too/>

⁵⁹² Bill Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 249.

sound that appeals to young and older fans, the Dixie Chicks became one of the most popular and powerful groups in music.

6.1 THE DIXIE CHICKS AS A CAUTIONARY TALE

After their 2002 album *Home* won three Grammy awards, the Dixie Chicks went on an international tour. At their concert in London in March of 2003, Maines said, in response to impending US military invasion of Iraq, “just so you know, we’re ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas.” Within days their climbing record sales plummeted, radio hosts banned their songs from airplay and even called for fans to throw out their CDs.⁵⁹³ Thus, Maines’s momentary criticism of President Bush overshadowed the band’s four years of colossal sales, consistent critical acclaim, and mass fandom.

“The incident” as the band calls it, not only defined the Dixie Chicks’ subsequent career and relationship to country music, it functioned as a cautionary tale to performers across popular culture. Comedian Dave Chappelle, in his 2004 comedy special, expressed his reluctance to criticize the Bush administration: “I almost protested the war in the beginning, till I saw what happened to them Dixie Chicks...if they’ll do that to three white women, they will tear my black

⁵⁹³ Justine Frances Stokes, “We’re Changing the Way We Do Business: A Critical Analysis of the Dixie Chicks and the Country Music Industry” (MA Thesis, Miami University, 2008).

ass to pieces.”⁵⁹⁴ In effect, the institutional and commercial backlash against the Dixie Chicks highlights the longstanding rhetorical boundaries in country music that were only strengthened by patriotism generated after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As Prividera and Howard argue, patriotism is often predicated on fulfilling stereotypical gender roles with the idea that white femininity should bolster white masculinity.⁵⁹⁵ Further, Cynthia Enloe argues that white women are often framed as “trophy” that men fight for and protect, especially in times of war.⁵⁹⁶ Therefore, the Dixie Chicks did not only violate “good white girl” decorum, as Patsy Cline and Loretta Lynn had done, they spoke out as young, white, American women to a *foreign* audience. Thus, the intersection of good white girl decorum and a perceived lack of patriotism compounded to solidify the Dixie Chicks’ traitorous “outsider” status.

The Dixie Chicks’ violation, I argue, rationalized country music’s shift to becoming a “safe space” for a brand of gendered, raced, conservatism that warrants analysis. More specifically, “the incident” gave country music gatekeepers an excuse to ostracize and punish women performers. This process allowed country music to double down on its now infamous conservatism. While it can be ideologically inconsistent and unlike country music’s original political reputation, country music conservatism primarily functions to uphold and preserve a “safe space” for white masculinity. Some conservative politicians, pundits, and older generations have been critical of the supposed “snowflake” generation comprised of liberal Millennials.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ K.A. Wisniewski, *The Comedy of Dave Chappelle: Critical Essays*, ed. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2009), 40. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7b5hJOG_9c, accessed February 6 2016.

⁵⁹⁵ Laura Prividera and John Howard III, “Masculinity, Whiteness, and the Warrior Hero: Perpetuating the Strategic Rhetoric of U.S. Nationalism and the Marginalization of Women,” *Women and Language* 29 (2006), 32.

⁵⁹⁶ Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

⁵⁹⁷ A “snowflake” is a pejorative term that aims to mock young people who are committed to human rights, social justice, and other liberal ideologies. It implies that young people are soft, delicate, individuals unable to acquiesce to hard realities of “the real world.” Also known as Generation Y, Millennials were born around 1982. They are typically the children of “Baby Boomers” and are often stigmatized as obsessed with technology,

They especially criticize those marginalized groups who advocate for “safe spaces” in attempt to foment solidarity and unpoliced, open dialogue. Ironically, as country music’s fan base was perceivably shifting and President Obama’s two terms represented change to the status quo, I argue that this industry has needed its own “safe space” to exercise outdated, uncritical white masculinity.

Jonathan Bernstein reports that nearly half of all country music’s estimated 95 million US fans are under the age of 44 and the majority of them are women, signally a potentially destabilizing shift in the once hegemonic space of country music.⁵⁹⁸ During this time of real and perceived change, white supremacist alt-right groups gradually mobilized, advocating a cosmopolitan youthful aesthetic that rebranded fledgling hate groups as a more cohesive and legitimized movement. Parallel to this mobilization, country music has cultivated a subgenre that champions up-and-coming white masculinity, after an era of destabilizing change to the status quo. Since the Dixie Chicks incident, women’s radio air-play in country music has declined considerably – rejecting the more inclusive country music sound of the 1990s.⁵⁹⁹ Thus, it is unsurprising that a subgenre called “bro-country” has arisen to largely define today’s country music as white, explicitly straight, and male.

simultaneously self-absorbed and concerned with social justice, often seen as lazy and entitled yet often high achieving and educated.

⁵⁹⁸ Jonathan Bernstein, “Country Music has Become Apolitical: Why Have Acts Kept Quiet on the Election?” *The Guardian* (Nov. 3, 2016): 3, accessed November 19 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/nov/03/country-music-election-politics>.

⁵⁹⁹ Beverly Keel, interview by the author, (Universal Music Group, Nashville, June 2012).

6.2 SAFE SPACES AND THE RISE OF BRO-COUNTRY

“Bro-country” is a term coined by music journalist Jody Rosen in 2013. In his analysis of “Cruise,” a 2013 hit by country duo Florida Georgia Line, Rosen calls the song’s substantial popularity “baffling” since it “doesn’t sound like much at all... It’s a summer song about summer songs.” He argues that this subgenre is a “movement” that has been germinating for years. He notes that it is music for the “tatted, gym-toned, party-hearty, young America white dude.”⁶⁰⁰ It is also created by this same archetypal “dude,” who performs songs about beautiful white girls, trucks, beer and youthful themes such as spring break to promote a cosmopolitan country aesthetic of a “frat-boy beach-bum fantasy.”⁶⁰¹ However, this genre also uncritically incorporates hip-hop and rap, yet resists any political discussions on racism, appropriation, and white men’s complicity or responsibility.

Brad Paisley and hip-hop artist LL Cool J, on the other hand, attempted to open up political dialogue on racism with a 2013 collaboration. However, their culturally tone-deaf song “Accidental Racist” about white men feeling “caught between southern pride and southern blame,” frees contemporary audiences from any responsibility, or even minor self-reflection. LL Cool J sings in his portion of the song: “if you don’t judge my do-rag, I won’t judge your red

⁶⁰⁰ Jody Rosen, “Jody Rosen on the Rise of Bro-Country,” *Vulture* (Aug. 11, 2013), accessed November 17 2016, <http://www.vulture.com/2013/08/rise-of-bro-country-florida-georgia-line.html>.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*

flag... If you don't judge my gold chains, I'll forget the iron chains." Here, he problematically compares a headscarf and necklace with the Confederate flag and slavery. In effect, today's country stars elect to sing comfortable, apolitical songs, even during the 2016 Presidential election.

In his 2017 article, Reggie Ugwu questions why Nashville has "tip-toed" around the issue of the 2016 Presidential election and President Trump.⁶⁰² He notes that many artists simply decline to be interviewed in this political climate. But the ones who are interviewed routinely cite the Dixie Chicks controversy and swift backlash as a reason for not being more political. 2017 "Best New Artist" Grammy winner Maren Morris highlights her own anxieties, referencing the famous line from a 2003 death threat reportedly sent to Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks: "It's a shame the 'shut up and sing' mentality is still alive and well."⁶⁰³ Bernstein reports that most country artists fear "professional fallout," since Nashville may be a liberal city, but the many conservative regions where fans live are not.⁶⁰⁴

Bernstein argues that "perhaps for the first time in the history of country music, the risks of merely supporting a presidential candidate firmly outweigh the rewards."⁶⁰⁵ Music scholar Diane Pecknold adds that there used to be an image of country music that was homogenous (i.e. conservative), but that is no longer the case. Audiences are younger and more of them live in cities. Therefore, many argue that country music's fan base is unpredictably polarized in its political ideologies. However, the sentiments and rhetorical boundaries of country music's "safe

⁶⁰² Reggie Ugwu, "Nashville's Last Taboo? Country Music Stars are Tiptoeing around Trump" *Buzzfeed* (Mar. 2, 2017), accessed March 4 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/reggieugwu/country-stars-and-donald-trump?utm_term=.blDg4q6RgP#.ijBNBOMJN3

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ Bernstein, "Country Music has Become Apolitical," 1.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

space” became salient in November 2016, when the Dixie Chicks joined Beyoncé in performing her hit song “Daddy Lessons” from her 2016 album *Lemonade*.

6.3 BEYONCÉ, THE DIXIE CHICKS, AND CHANGING MUSICAL LANDSCAPES

Beyoncé Knowles is one of the most successful contemporary icons in popular culture. As a Black woman who publically identifies as a feminist and activist, she is political in both language and action. Her 2016 album *Lemonade* was not only innovative in its style and format, it was often touted as “unapologetically Black.” However, this seemingly affirming phrase actually functions to recenter whiteness as the neutral unraced standard. Journalist Brian Josephs argues that the US is so “pathologically anti-black” that merely “embracing blackness is a rebellious act in our society.”⁶⁰⁶ Beyoncé’s Black-affirming lyrics as well as her allusions to her southern heritage, Black culture, and contemporary political discourse were explicit and perhaps uncomfortable for some white audiences. Specifically, her song “Formation” made use of vivid imagery alluding to Hurricane Katrina destruction and featured graffiti that says “Stop Killing Us.” These references, flanked by more layered and subtle imagery, explicitly pointed to injustices in the Black community by US leaders – inadequate assistance after the devastating natural disaster and unjust policing practices, such as the documented cases of police brutality

⁶⁰⁶ Brian Josephs, “Stop Calling Art ‘Unapologetically Black,’” *Complex* (Oct. 20, 2016), accessed February 11 2016, <http://www.complex.com/life/2016/10/solange-dangelo-atlanta-luke-cage-unapologetically-black>.

that contribute to the long and brutal narrative of violence against Black bodies in the US at the hands of white people. Further, Beyoncé's performance at the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show in a costume akin to a Black Panther, inciting impassioned discourse.⁶⁰⁷ As Beyoncé notes in her song "Formation," "you know you that bitch when you start all this conversation," alluding to the pride felt and derision endured when mobilizing silence into language and action. While I do not attempt to analyze Beyoncé's rhetorically rich lyrics and remarkable visual rhetoric that warrant careful attention, Beyoncé's recent political significance is so powerful and unavoidable that country music fans were well aware of, and likely threatened by, her politically charged discourse.

Beyoncé's CMA performance, combined with another "outsider" the Dixie Chicks, the Country Music Awards performance was rhetorically "too much." Country music fans responded immediately through social media. Their criticisms consisted primarily of claims that Beyoncé is "not country" and that she is "not welcome."⁶⁰⁸ A reporter for Country Music Television, Alison Bonaguro, insists that just because Beyoncé performs a song with "a little harmonica and mentions of classic vinyls, rifles, and whiskey" does not mean that she has earned the right to move to Nashville and announce that "she's country now."⁶⁰⁹ This territorial criticism akin to "get out" reveals that the CMA stage has been designated a "safe space," preserved for certain accepted bodies. Brett Anderson points out that "mainstream country's conservative fans can still

⁶⁰⁷ However, all the dancers and performers in Beyoncé's half time spectacle were Black women wearing clothes and aesthetic markers of the Black Panther Party. By showing women in this garb, Beyoncé is offering feminist commentary on the noted exclusionary, sexist and heterosexist practices of the Black Panther Party and Civil Rights movements that regularly excluded Black women, and negated queer Black women, from leadership roles to establish patriarchal order.

⁶⁰⁸ Randall Roberts, "Conservative Country Music Fans Lash Out at CMA Performance by Beyoncé and the Dixie Chicks," *LA Times*, (Nov. 3, 2016), accessed March 3 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-conservative-cma-beyonce-dixie-chicks-20161103-htmlstory.html>

⁶⁰⁹ Alison Bonaguro, "What's So Country about Beyoncé?" *CMT* (April 25, 2016), accessed March 3 2016, <http://www.cmt.com/news/1765408/whats-so-country-about-beyonce/>

operate like unofficial censors.”⁶¹⁰ It also highlights that Nashville is not to be infiltrated by outsiders. Meanwhile, pop star Justin Timberlake’s collaboration with country blues rocker Chris Stapleton at the 2015 CMAs was met with great celebration; they are both white men.

Timberlake is from Tennessee and Knowles is from Texas, which reveals inconsistency in the regional southern ethos often lauded in country music. However, Beyoncé fans, dubbed the “Beyhive,” responded by reminding angry critics that country music is deeply rooted in Black culture and that her performance helped to make country music “relevant.”⁶¹¹ Moreover, country fans on social media insisted that they were simply angry because Beyoncé’s *music* does not fit the country genre and that her performance overshadowed deserving country performers; however, this argument, promulgated by many white women, is only thinly veiled.

While the country music fan base has seemingly shifted to be more inclusive, the 2016 response to Beyoncé as “outsider” reveals unrelenting sexism, internalized misogyny, and racism present in contemporary country music. What this reveals, I argue, is that country music reflects political trends that are overlooked. Particularly, political trends of many white women who resist feminism. Antifeminist campaigns, as I have noted, have been very successful at instilling a negative connotation with women’s empowerment. By rendering political women threatening, unlovable, unfeminine, angry, intellectual, and frigid, it is unsurprising that many young white women, in particular, find acquiescing to banal, apolitical femininity safe and comfortable. Country music allows white women to uncritically celebrate “equality” through their choice of adhering to patriarchal structures that they do not see as problematic, despite a long history of

⁶¹⁰ Brett Anderson, “Southern Bands that are Politically Progressive, and Proud of It,” *New York Times* (Oct. 7, 2016), accessed, January 16 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/arts/music/drive-by-truckers-southern-progressive-bands.html?_r=0

⁶¹¹ While Black men have performed in country music spaces (e.g., Ray Charles, Charlie Pride, and even Sam Cooke), women of color and Black women specifically have not – making Beyoncé’s presence particularly noteworthy.

women's complicity in their own undoing – politically, legally, domestically, institutionally, and financially. I point this out because many people are baffled by how and why the reported 54 percent of white women who voted – voted for Donald Trump. While disturbing to legions of voters who recognize Trump as dangerous to women's hard-fought rights among other reasons, many white women disagree. In fact, I argue that Trump's simplistic and "insider" vs. "outsider" language that offers clear scapegoats relies on the tragic frame. More importantly, Trump's misogynistic and criminal "locker room talk" resonated with white women who are attracted to uncomplicated, apolitical discourse that is safe, unambiguous, and complimentary of white women's traditionalist roles. In other words, Trump, in many instances, sounds like "bro-country."

While Trump seems like he would be an outsider to country music – as a mega rich white collar worker from New York City, Trump was popular in regions known for country music such as the rural Midwest, the South, and Appalachia. In fact, music historian Don Cusic points out that "Trump sticks to one-to-two syllable words, like a country song. He speaks the language of the country audience."⁶¹² Katherine Rosman adds that "You can see why 'Make America Great Again' resonated. It's basically a lyric to a country song."⁶¹³ Further, Diane Pecknold argues that "there's a long tradition, particularly among male country artists, of the abject loser [character] who everybody criticizes but he just goes along and says what he thinks... I think Trump's persona aligns with that."⁶¹⁴ More importantly, many cultural critics have overlooked how today's country music, while not explicitly in favor of Trump, creates and sustains a climate in

⁶¹² Bernstein, "Country Music has Become Apolitical," 1.

⁶¹³ Katherine Rosman, "He Sees Country Music in 'Make America Great Again,'" *New York Times* (Feb. 10, 2017), accessed February 18 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/10/fashion/kurt-bardella-country-music-newsletter-morning-hangover-tipsheet.html>

⁶¹⁴ Ugwu, "Nashville's Last Taboo," 1.

which feminism is rejected. By cleansing country music of women artists with political opinions and nuanced interpretations of issues, country music is not only a safe space for white masculinity but for uncomplicated, white femininity that defines itself by what it is not. What many white women defined themselves *against* in the 2016 election was Hillary Clinton, who is “not some little woman standing by [her] man.” This was revealed in voter turnout.

Furthermore, without women like Patsy Cline, Bobbie Gentry, Dolly Parton, and Loretta Lynn in today’s mainstream country music, this storied genre runs the risk of inculcating young white women to believe their only form of agency is through their “alliance with the superior caste.”⁶¹⁵ The results of the 2016 election only highlight how country music reveals political trends. While apolitical in its lyrics, its rhetorical limits disallow competing narratives that disrupt the centering of white masculinity, and by proxy, subordinate white femininity. By limiting women’s music on the radio, by punishing women who have transgressive opinions, by controlling women’s contracts, by allowing only token woman like Carrie Underwood to compete in the “Old Boys’ Club,” gatekeepers maintain a safe space that preserves uncritical white masculinity. In effect, contemporary disciplinary mechanisms reveal why these four case studies are so important to discussions of women in country music and rhetorical study.

By looking to women in the past who have negotiated and successfully navigated conservative gatekeepers, country music fans, audiences of women, and cultural critics can recognize the persistence and sacrifice required to make the impact these four women did. Cultural critics can recognize how country music, while seemingly lowbrow and simple, reflects significant cultural and political trends that warrant continued analysis. More specifically, the analysis of these four women and their rhetorical strategies contribute to rhetorical study and a

⁶¹⁵ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 10.

more nuanced understanding of the discourses and tensions of the second wave of feminism. Their contributions to country music, while varied, contributed to the transformation of silence into language and action.

By complicating Patsy Cline's public memory, I highlighted that contemporary US culture seeks nonexistent, ageless constructions of femininity as American icons. This has significant political implications as we struggle to take women seriously as leaders and rhetors. By rendering Cline a rhetorical eye-con, audiences can make her what they need her to be. Audiences, in turn, are safe and comfortable and never have to interrogate their own deep-seated prejudice. Thus, Cline – safely situated in the past – runs the risk of being coopted into contemporary narratives of patriotism and postfeminism.

Bobbie Gentry's lyrics reveal that country music songs can be political, popular, and feminist, highlighting the nuance and complexity of women's rhetoric from the second wave that has largely been lost in contemporary country music. By pointing out her strategic silences, I complicate and contribute to cogent feminist scholarship on voice. More importantly, Gentry was taking subversive stands in her music *a half century ago*. Arguably, her sentiments would be provocative if released today, showing the political potential of the second wave of feminism and that her discourse mattered to policy, like *Roe vs. Wade*, that improved women's lives. By amplifying silences, Gentry spoke to the legions of desperate, disenfranchised women who lacked basic autonomy. Her lyrics spoke to women's lived reality that made a difference. While she risked being alienated from the music industry, her music made an indisputable rhetorical impact.

Dolly Parton's narratives during the second wave were provocative and politically salient because she has consistently championed "being yourself." Despite disciplinary mechanisms that

insist there is something wrong with you, Parton has mobilized a persona and presence that has improved the lives of women and other marginalized groups. Her celebration of self-expression, sexuality, and one's complicated roots, is still refreshing and speaks to the legions of fans who have never quite fit in to society's sometimes stifling expectations. By analyzing her rhetorical strategies, I highlight the potential role of ghost husbands amidst problematic patriarchal constraints and the academic utility of fusing rhetorical study and camp scholarship.

Loretta Lynn represents, to me, the unequivocal necessity of feminism and the significance of the second wave. By tracing her personal and professional growth over a substantial career, I understand why fans have flocked to her music and connected to her story. Her 1976 autobiography and the subsequent 1980 film that chronicles her life resonate with audiences across demographics. Yet what most fans do not recognize is that Lynn's career would likely not have been possible without feminism. Meaning, Lynn's identifications with her female fans in particular was predicated on their mutual understanding of oppression. Her use of the comic corrective and feminine style reveals its impact to disenfranchised women, which has largely been erased from today's country music because it has the potential to incite change. In other words, Lynn's music improved the lives of women by amplifying feminist sentiment that has been historically suppressed as a threat.

Further, feminist sentiment has been largely eradicated from today's mainstream country music in favor of apolitical narratives that privilege white masculinity. In effect, the presidential election reflects this country music trend, which was overlooked by political and cultural critics. Most significantly, when feminist narratives are scrubbed from media outlets, many complicit women default to apolitical subservience to men and are encouraged to see feminists as their adversaries. Thus, my dissertation reveals that country has not always been explicitly

antifeminist, but rather, country artists took subversive stands in rhetorically intricate and important ways. I implore today's country musicians to reflect upon the rhetorical strategies of country music's legendary second wave women to see the possibilities available in resisting the "safe space" of white masculinity promulgated by "bro-country."

6.4 POLITICAL POSSIBILITIES AND CRITICAL POTENTIAL

Some progressive country musicians are taking the lead, however, in diversifying today's mainstream "bro-country." For example, Sturgill Simpson, soon after winning the 2017 Grammy for best country album, released a music video for his song "All around You" with imagery directly refuting the masculine, "patriotic" narrative of hardened stoicism and penetrating militarism. He also explicitly criticizes Trump's draconian speaking aesthetic. Also from "Nashville's progressive-minded perimeters" is Margo Price, Shovels & Rope, and Kacey Musgraves, whose lyrics incorporate feminist antagonisms, self-reflection, and incite consciousness raising.⁶¹⁶ Additionally, mainstream country star Eric Church wrote the popular song "Kill a Word," which calls to end the use of racist slurs. As southern rock singer Patterson Hood explains, the time has come for "a white guy with a heavy Southern accent [to] say 'Black Lives Matter.'"⁶¹⁷ This way, the insider/outsider dichotomy becomes less polarizing and country

⁶¹⁶ Ugwu, "Nashville's Last Taboo," 1.

⁶¹⁷ Anderson, "Southern Bands," 1.

music, a powerful and influential medium across the US, could mobilize in order to challenge reductionist, fear-inducing political leaders who may unethically pander to the legions of disenfranchised country music fans who want to be heard.

According to Bernstein, Hillary Clinton “has largely avoided any appeals to the country music world” since her “Wynette comment” of 1992, which cemented her status as an outsider.⁶¹⁸ Like Patsy Cline who refused to acquiesce to industry demands and sexist social decorum, the Dixie Chicks conveyed that they too would resist making any appeals to the country music industry. In their 2006 song “Not Ready to Make Nice,” the Dixie Chicks articulate their resistance:

Forgive sounds good / forget I’m not sure I could / I paid a price... I’m not ready to make nice / I’m not ready to back down. / I’m still mad as hell, and I don’t have time to go ‘round and ‘round and ‘round.... / I know you said “Why can’t you just get over it? / It turned my whole world around / and I kinda like it.

This song, which won three Grammy awards including the coveted album and song of the year, became the Dixie Chicks’ biggest selling album to date.⁶¹⁹ This success is not only a testament to their talents, but that despite institutional censorship, backlash, and enforced silences, empowered women tend to survive. Like Loretta Lynn’s “The Pill” that was shut out of country music and banned from its stations, the song was still widely popular because her deeply loyal fans demanded its airplay as an important, political song about issues affecting many women.

⁶¹⁸ Bernstein, “Country Music has Become Apolitical,” 1.

⁶¹⁹ Alan Light, “The Dixie Chicks, Long Past Making Nice,” *New York Times* (June 10, 2016), accessed March 2 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/12/arts/music/dixie-chicks-return-tour.html>.

Moreover, women leaders, like Hillary Clinton, should perhaps not ignore country music's female fans who do have a history of loyal feminist-inspired solidarity.

In this conclusion, I have highlighted some contemporary trends in country music that offer potential for future research. By highlighting the “cautionary tale” of the Dixie Chicks, I aim to point out the residual rhetorical limits imposed on women in country music. These limits require women to continually invent and adapt rhetorical strategies to resist institutional, commercial, and political backlash – particularly in the current political climate. By engaging and analyzing women's overlooked contributions to country music, this research study contributes to ongoing discussions in feminist criticism and rhetorical study. While women have participated in country music from its beginnings, women's contributions have been problematically relegated to the margins. By recovering, highlighting, and analyzing the rhetorically rich and layered pieces of music history featured in this research project, I hope to spark interest among cultural critics to engage this noteworthy medium and its ongoing significance. By tracing the rhetorical strategies of country music's legendary second wave women, I recognize and appreciate country music's rhetorical potential as well as the dazzling legacies of Patsy Cline, Bobbie Gentry, Dolly Parton, and Loretta Lynn.

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