GENDER, HEGEMONY, AND COUNTRY MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception, country music has proven to be a powerful medium of communication and expression in contemporary culture. Reining as the most popular musical format in radio today, the themes expressed by contemporary country musicians, particularly female country musicians, are diverse and varied, proving the importance of evolution in this once considered homogeneous format. This study explores how modern female country musicians use their lyrics as tools for highlighting dominant, hegemonic gender roles in culture. Guided by Stuart Hall’s encoding and decoding theory (1980) and feminist communication theory (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004) this study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine two hit songs from current female country megastars - Carrie Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” and Miranda Lambert’s “Gunpowder and Lead”. This study finds that while both artists use their lyrical discourse as a means to challenge dominant feminine gender roles, they are simultaneously reinforcing dominant, and often negative, masculine gender roles. Further research on this subject needs to be conducted in order to conclude the overall effectiveness of popular musicians using the feminist communication theory of voice in their lyrics to combat hegemony.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Importance of Study

The sophisticated concept of hegemony, how it is defined, gained, and maintained within societies, has long been the debate of scholars. While a single, all-encompassing definition of hegemony does not exist, most scholars agree that hegemony is a multidimensional concept (Allen, 2011; Conrad, 1988; Dines & McMahon-Humez, 2011). Research supports that hegemony occurs when one social group dominates another, thus making the dominant group’s belief systems the prevailing ideological norm (Allen, 2011; Conrad 1988). Furthermore, in order for hegemony to continue to thrive within a society, Conrad (1988) has found that hegemonic views must be expansive, flexible, and grounded in symbolic action in order for dominance to go unchallenged. Power holders can then remain in control, while subordinate groups remain complacent.

Just as various definitions and theories of hegemony exist, so too do various groups exist that are affected by hegemonic dominance. Hegemony can operate in political, economic, and cultural settings, in large national groups, or small-scale organizations; hegemonic thought permeates all aspects of a society (Allen, 2011; Dines & McMahon-Humez, 2011). Media industries provide a particularly covert vehicle for dominant ideologies to perpetuate and result in hegemony. The music industry, specifically country music, is rich in “portraying values, images, and ideas to listeners” which impact our dominant belief systems (Wilson, 2000). This thesis will discuss how hegemony relates to gender roles found in contemporary country music, the importance of examining this relationship, and how critical discourse analysis can be used to examine how current popular female country artists both resist and reinforce hegemonic gender roles through their music.
Statement of the Problem

This study aims to examine how contemporary female country musicians both embrace and challenge hegemonic gender roles within their music. Compared to other genres, such as rock or hip-hop, little scholarly research has been performed on country music as a whole, and even less research has centered on the analysis of the strictly female country music artist perspective (McClane-Bunn, 2010). Since a great deal of the current research evaluates the visual medium of music video, this study will analyze the most basic unit of a musician’s art form – the written lyric. The rise in popularity of the country music genre, especially with female country superstars such as Miranda Lambert and Carrie Underwood, proves this is an important, powerful means of communication in our current culture. The lyrical discourse of country music, like all other forms of communication, is laden with messages that need to be critically decoded in order to better understand the deeper, cultural impact of the discourse as a whole.

Organization of Chapters

This study on hegemony, gender, and country music is organized into five separate, though interwoven, chapters. As previously mentioned, this first chapter gives a brief introduction to hegemony and country music, the overall purpose of this study, and the cultural problems it wishes to address. In chapter two the theoretical foundation of this study is laid. Stuart Hall’s cultural studies approach and encoding/decoding theory is discussed, as well as feminist communication theory. This chapter also provides a review of current literature on hegemony in media, gender roles in popular music, and women’s representation in country music and delineates the research questions. The third chapter discusses the scope and methodology of this research, including a more in-depth examination of critical discourse
analysis and how it is used in this study. The case studies and results are outlined in chapter four; taking time to discuss the analysis of lyrical discourse from Carrie Underwood and Miranda Lambert. This study concludes with chapter five, which draws attention to limitations of this research, as well as recommendations for further areas of study.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

For over two-hundred years country music has proven to be a powerful, expressive American musical tradition (Bufwack & Oermann, 2003; McClane-Bunn, 2010). It has provided a creative outlet for many individuals, especially those in the working class, to express their hopes and dreams, fears and frustration, struggles and inner most desires. Over the years the sound of country music has shifted and evolved; from the folk sounds of the Appalachian Mountains, to the gospel sounds of the deep South, to today’s contemporary country music with its rock/pop/hip-hop hybridity (Bufwack & Oermann, 2003; Morris, 2011). Though with all of these transformations in sound occurring in country music, one thing remains unchanged - this is the music of people with a story to tell. And it is women who, in recent years, have increasingly become these storytellers.

In their 2003 book *Finding Her Voice: Women in County Music, 1800-2000*, Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann chronicle the women who have contributed vastly to the fabric of country music. This comprehensive volume attempts to highlight not only the “greats” of this genre (such as Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, and Dolly Parton), but the unknown, average American women who have enriched this tradition as well. The authors explain “this book finds those ‘silenced’ voices” (p. xiii). All too often it is the famous white men of country music, with their jeans, cowboy hats, and large belt buckles that are considered to be the innovators of this format; they are considered to be the average country musician (Morris, 2010). For decades male artists, such as Willie Nelson or Toby Keith, have been celebrated because of their “masculine behaviors, appearances, and gestures of the mythic hard-drinking, tough fighting, working man” (Pruitt, 2007). All the while the women of country music, with their uniquely feminine perspective, have been marginalized. This study, just like the work of Bufwack and Oermann, will strive to shed light on “this rarely acknowledged group of women” (Bufwack & Oermann,
2003, p. xiii) in country music - the ways in which they embrace and challenge their gender roles, and how current female musicians are using their lyrics as important discursive tools in redefining hegemonic thought.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

This study assumes that it is important to examine existing gender power structures within media in order to understand how hegemony operates in the day to day lives of individuals. An additional component of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how dominant gender ideologies permeate nearly all aspects of one’s life, including seemingly innocent media and entertainment choices such as the music one listens to. The researcher assumes that all individuals are affected in some way by the media they consume, as illustrated by the communication theories outlined in the following section. This more critical understanding of hegemonic thought, and the ideologies that assist in shaping it, will allow for individuals to become active participants in either accepting or resisting the principles that govern their lives. Ultimately, this study aims, through its analysis, to expose how popular female country musicians and music can be used as a powerful tool to both perpetuate and challenge hegemonic gender roles.

**Theoretical Basis**

In her 2007 conference paper “The Dixie Chicks vs., Toby Keith: Country Music’s Contested Ideologies and the Culture Way in American”, Lori Henson stresses “country music is not neatly comprised of a single lived experience or ideology” (p. 5). Indeed, when examining subject matter as rich and diverse as country music, an equally rich and diverse theoretical framework should be chosen as a guiding force. The approach of cultural studies proves to be especially useful when researching issues in various forms of media, such as popular music, because it provides strong theoretical foundations for examining different cultural issues,
particularly those issues concerned with the struggle for and maintenance of power. In order to better understand the relationship between women, gender roles, and country music Hall’s cultural study theory of encoding/decoding is explored.

Cultural studies gained popularity and secured its place as a legitimate approach in academia thanks in large part to critical scholar Stuart Hall (Griffin, 2009). Hall (1980a) explains, “the ‘theory of culture’ is defined as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life. ‘Culture’ is not a practice…it is threaded though all social practices, and is the sum of their inter-relationships” (p. 60). It is then easy to understand the importance of critically examining cultural influence when viewing, “culture as interwoven with all social practices; and those practices, in turn, as a common form of human activity” (Hall, 1980a, p. 63). Hall believes that cultural studies can be a significant tool in discovering how ideologies are formed and solidified within a society, with particular attention paid to the role of the media in communicating these ideologies. “Ideologies are here being conceptualized, not as the contents and surface forms of ideas, but as the unconscious categories though which conditions are represented and lived” (Hall, 1980a, p.66). Knowing this, it is then easy to see how dominant ideology organically permeates and shapes individual’s values and beliefs systems. Dominant ideologies “help to validate worldviews that help dictate our attitudes and behaviors”, especially dictating values of power and control (Allen, 2011, p. 32). Left unchallenged, these values then reinforce the initial ideology that shaped them, and they cycle of power continues.

An important theory in the realm of cultural studies is Hall’s encoding/decoding theory. A key principle of this theory revolves around the idea that:

Before [a] message can have an ‘effect’ (however defined), satisfy a ‘need’, or be put to a ‘use’, it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully
decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings which ‘have an effect’, influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological behavioral consequences. (Hall, 1980b, p. 130)

Therefore all messages communicated contain some form of encoded meaning that intends to have an effect on the receiver. This proves to be especially useful for this particular study since it aims to critically examine, or decode, the gendered messages found within contemporary country music song lyrics. Hall suggests that meaningful discourse then does not just haphazardly occur, but rather is mediated.

Though initially used to explain how messages are strategically created and received though television, this theory translates well to other mediums, including popular music. Hall (1980b) further explains:

Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and though language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and though discourse. Discursive ‘knowledge’ is the product not of transparent representation of the ‘real’ in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions. Thus there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. (p. 131)

This operation of code, or hidden ideological messages, in discourse proves to be a powerful communication tool. The songs that are analyzed in the following research rely entirely on expressing meaning though written language, though lyrics. According to Hall’s theory, these lyrics are to be viewed as the vehicles that mediate reality, including, but not limited, to ideologies of gender.

Another influential theory which guides this study is feminist communication theory, particularly the idea of voice. Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) explore the importance of voice in
both feminist theory and feminist communication theory, concluding that it is one of the most important concepts associated with these schools of thought. They explain “we advocate using the term *voice* to mean the means and ability to speak and to have one’s speech heard and be taken into account in social and political life” (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004, p. 95). This concept of using one’s voice as a means of self-expression is echoed by contemporary musicians of all formats, but is especially true for female country musicians (Bufwack & Oermann, 2003).

Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) further explain that effectively all academic fields “have used the concept of voice as a methodology to recover women’s experiences, meanings, and resistance to their subordinate positions” (p. 94). The notion of women’s voice expressing meaning and resistance is also true in forms of artwork, such as popular music. When women participate in public discourse, they are consequently participating in asserting women’s voice (Rakow and Wackwitz, 2004, p. 94). Therefore, by critically examining the songs of female country artists, the researcher is also examining the voice of these women, the experiences they have undergone, and the ways in which they resist subordination.

**The Literature**

**Hegemony in Media**

In his 2000 book *Media, Communications and Culture: A Global Approach*, James Lull investigates the impact of media, communication, and culture in an increasingly global climate. Building on the theories of Italian writer Antonio Gramsci, Lull explains how hegemony allows for social power to be gained through ideological influence of a dominant group or force. Lull (2000) argues that mass media are powerful tools that the “ruling elites” use in order to spread and gain support of their messages in the public arena. Hegemony, accordingly to Lull, is not gained simply out of ideological articulation, but rather “hegemony requires that ideological
assertions become self-evident cultural assumptions” (2000, p. 50). By integrating cultural ideologies throughout our various forms of media and entertainment, those in positions of power are able to disguise their influence, thus allowing hegemony to “easily go undetected” (p. 51).

The role of hegemony in mass media is also the topic discussed in Terri L. Russ’ 2007 conference paper, The Parents are Clueless and the Kids are Cute: Media Hegemony in Action. Russ agrees that, on the most basic level, the process of hegemony is attaining power through the perpetuation of ideas, not armed forces. She illustrates that “media is a tool that can be and is used [by] to perpetuate ideologies of power, wealth, status, culture, and related items” (Russ, 2007, p. 1) and in turn these ideologies represent what individuals understand to be ideal and preferred ways of acting and being. Russ (2007) further argues that since so many individuals “turn to media to help us make sense of our lives” (p. 1), repeated exposure to these ideologies result in changed behavior, altered cultural norms, and hegemony in action.

Gender Roles in Popular Music

Through understanding the nature of hegemony, researchers are better able to explore how hegemonic beliefs operate in one’s day to day life and how they influence social identity. One way of exploring this is to research how hegemony relates to traditional gender roles, and how these roles are depicted in the media we consume. The mediums of popular music and music videos are an especially useful lens to study cultural hegemony in action since “music videos change as music evolves, which emphasizes the mutability of this particular type of popular media” (Moncrief, 2004b, p. 20).

Over the past 30 years, a copious amount of research has been performed relating to gender roles and representation in popular music (Calhoun, 2005; Click & Kramer 2007; Lewis, 1990). Data from this research illustrates how the music industry often constructs and
perpetuates gender roles in traditional, stereotypical manners in both the music’s lyrics and videos (Click & Kramer, 2007; Leonardi & Dickinson, 2007; Moncrief, 2004a). Click and Kramer (2007) highlight primary gendered difference between males and females in contemporary popular music, including: women’s underrepresentation versus male dominance, women being highlighted for their physical appearance and beauty versus men being highlighted for their musical ability, and women being portrayed as staying the same/never maturing over the years while men mature and gain increased responsibility over time.

One particularly disturbing gender trend found in contemporary music is the extent to which women’s bodies are being portrayed in a sexualized manner (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). After analyzing the different genres of rock, country, and hip-hop music, Moncrief (2004b) concluded that across all genres “females were depicted as more attractive, decorative, and sexualized than their male counterparts” (p. 1). Females in these three genres were also significantly more likely to expose various body parts (cleavage, midriff, and upper thigh) in music videos than male figures (Moncrief, 2004b). These trends are acutely important since researchers suggest “a link between adolescents’ beliefs about women as sex objects and their exposure to homogenous media depictions of objectified/sexualized women and sexually explicit materials” (Turner, 2008, p. 3). It becomes easy then to link media consumption with the generation of gender stereotypes and ideologies, which over time become hegemonic views of how male and female genders should be represented.

**Women’s Representation in Country Music**

While the previous research demonstrates that stereotypical gender roles are prominent across many genres of music, it has also been determined that different genres use different tactics in order to convey this message (Moncrief, 2004b). Many researchers argue the portrayal
of traditional gender roles is especially prevalent in the genre of country music (Andsager & Roe, 1999; McClane-Bunn, 2010; Witte, 2008), while others argue that country music is a place where contemporary female artists can openly challenge “the traditional, confining gender roles that dominant American culture espouses” (Wilson, 2000, p. 290). In her 2008 conference paper *From 'The Dixie Chicks' to 'The Dixie Sluts': Gender and Scapegoating in a Time of War*, Erin Witte explains one reason for the prevalence of traditional gender roles, especially feminine ones, by country musicians is because they are “bound by more conservative rules of conduct than artists in other musical genres” (p. 8). Patriotism, family values, Southern gentility, and traditional gender roles are just some of the conservative rules which govern the country music genre (Henson, 2007). These conservative rules “hold women in positions of subordination” within the country music community (Witte, 2008, p. 15) and limit the available subject matter which female country musicians can discuss.

The argument that women in country music adhere to a hegemonic feminine gender roles is further supported in Julie Andsager and Kimberly Roe’s 1999 article *Country Music Video in Country’s Year of the Woman*. Andsager and Roe examined the status of women in country music videos during 1997, the self-dubbed “Year of the Woman” by the country music record industry. They found “country music video is remarkably similar to other genres” in that female artists “have not reached an equal footing with male artists” (Andsager & Roe, 1999, p. 78). In their music videos, male country artists “were most likely to incorporate condescending or very traditional portrayals of their female characters” including portraying women as brides, pregnant, or as housewives, sexualizing women by keeping them scantily clad, or by focusing on specific body parts such as the thighs and buttocks (Andsager & Roe, 1999, p. 79). Female country musicians would typically portray themselves as “fully equal to men” in their music videos,
though lyrically they would stick to traditional feminine subject matters such as romance or heartbreak (Andsager & Roe, 1999, p. 79).

Such stereotyping of women comes as no surprise to Ann Dee McClane-Bunn, author of *Sex in the Hillbilly Field: Objectification of Women in County Music Videos* (2010). McClane-Bunn (2010) argues that “women in modern country music videos are often portrayed as sexualized objects” (p. 6) with their primary role serving to visually pleasure the male viewer. This is done through a variety of tactics in country music video, including focusing on women’s body parts, women serving a gratuitous presence, and women being scantily clad (McClane-Bunn, 2010). She further argues that while there may have been a “makeover” to include and highlight female artists in the country music industry in recent years, “country music has unfortunately fallen victim to the very sexist impulse to which advertising fell victim years ago: making women into commercialized sex objects as a way to sell more products and therefore make a profit” (McClane-Bunn, 2010, p. 19).

**Rationale**

Investigating how gender roles are constructed and perpetuated in forms of popular music, such as country, has a variety of positive benefits including increased media literacy skills, deeper understand of current social trends, understanding how hegemony operates, and gaining a deeper understanding of what steps need to be taken in order to practice forms of social resistance. Any time one critically analyzes a form of media, be it a newspaper, television show, video game, or book, media literacy skills strengthen. By cultivating media literacy skills, consumers become better informed about how mass media functions and the techniques that are used in order to impact their lives (Potter, 2011). Researching popular forms of country music also allows for a more critical understanding of social trends within a particular population
group, which research suggests can be significantly affected by media exposure (Moncrief, 2004a). Finally, by researching gender roles and country music we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the complex power struggle associated with hegemony and learn ways in which media consumers can use resistance to generate social change (Lull, 2005).

The 2011 Arbitron report *Radio Today: How America’s Listen to Radio* finds that country music is now the number one most popular musical format overall, with 52% of women and 48% of men admitting to listening to this genre (p. 15). Yet despite its popularity, “country music has been a largely untapped area of scholarly research, especially where women are concerned” and this proves to be a major setback for media, communication, and gender studies (McClane-Bunn, 2010, p. 6). Continued research and analysis of the country music genre, with particular emphasis on female country musicians and the ways in which they construct gender roles through country music, will no doubt prove to be a beneficial contribution to both the academic and music industries. This is especially when keeping in mind that, “country musicians are not merely ‘political puppets”, but [that] they actively use their influence to push for social, political, and economic change” (Henson, 2007, p. 6). The research in this study can help current and future country music artists reject ideological representations of what it means to be “female” or “male”, and aid in creating true change in the form of equal representation of all genders in the music industry.

**Research Question**

The research supports the thought that hegemony is, indeed, a multidimensional concept with numerous ways of defining what it is and how it is gained and maintained in society (Allen, 2011; Conrad, 1988; Dines & McMahon-Humez, 2011; Hall et al., 1980). Stereotypes and ideologies in the media, and particularly in contemporary music, can be used in order to
perpetuate traditional gender roles, often resulting in males being viewed as the more powerful, more dominant gender and females being submissive or overly sexualized (Calhoun, 2005; Click & Kramer 2007; Lewis, 1990). Hegemony and its relationship to gender and media are issues that affect people worldwide, regardless of age, race, class, or ethnicity. Additional research on the subjects of hegemonic feminine gender roles and female country musicians will prove to be useful since this is an area lacking much formal academic research, especially in light of the recent massive surge in popularity of country music in the United States (Arbitron, 2011). A deeper understanding of hegemony as an important force within media and gender roles ultimately results in a deeper understanding of ourselves. Through the careful analysis of different modern female country music texts, utilizing the research methodology of critical discourse analysis, this study advances the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do contemporary female country music artists challenge hegemonic feminine gender roles in their lyrics?

RQ 2: How do contemporary female country music artists reinforce hegemonic masculine gender roles in their lyrics?

RQ 3: Through the assertion of voice, do female country musicians effectively challenge hegemony?
Chapter 3: Scope and Methodology

The Scope of the Study

When researching a subject as vast and varied as popular music, it is essential to examine the scope of the particular study; those elements that are and are not being researched. The subject matter for this particular study is highly specific as it examines the song lyrics of two current female country musicians. This study does not focus on all country musicians, but rather is interested in only those country musicians identified as female. Finally, this study does not evaluate all women of country music, only those deemed as contemporary who have gained popularity and mega-stardom within the last ten years. These particular parameters were put in place since the majority of scholarly research on women in country music is dated, having occurred prior to the mid-2000’s (Andsager & Roe, 1999; Bufwack & Oermann, 2003; Conrad, 1988; Moncrief, 2004a; Moncrief, 2004b; Wilson, 2000). Since the popularity of the format has increased significantly over the past 10 years (Arbitron, 2011), with females accounting for 52% of the listener base (Country Music Association, 2011), the subject matter is ripe with complex issues that require further examination.

The two artists in this study were deliberately selected in order to best fit the requirements of the research question. Both Carrie Underwood and Miranda Lambert have proven their status as female country music stars based on their Billboard Chart history and impressive lists of accolades from the country music industry. Both women have also had multiple successful songs that, based on initial listening, appear to challenge hegemonic gender roles that have been traditionally associated with country music. Lastly, both Underwood and Lambert rose to stardom, within the past 10 years, after their participation in the wildly popular televised singing competitions American Idol and Nashville Star, respectively. Prior to their appearances on these shows, both women lived modest, working class lives in states with deep
connections to the genre of country music: Underwood hails from Oklahoma and Lambert from Texas. Demographically these women embody the average country music listener. Therefore, due to these highly specific requirements the purposive sampling method was used in order to achieve a more in-depth investigation of this very specific category of mass media.

In addition to the specific subject matter detailed above, the scope of this study is limited by the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its chosen methodology. Only the written song lyric will be examined, keeping true to the parameters set forth in CDA. A final element in the scope of this study is that it is primarily concerned with investigating issues of power and gender as they relate to hegemony. All other cultural topics that may be present within this artifact (such as elements of race, class, status) would require additional investigation and research, as they fall outside of the scope of this study.

**Methodology of the Study**

**Design**

In order to best address the aforementioned research questions about how contemporary female country artists challenge and reinforce hegemonic feminine gender roles in the lyrics of their music, the chosen research design for this study will be the implementation of critical discourse analysis or CDA. Qualitative in nature, this critical perspective proves to be the best fit research methodology for many reasons, the first of which is illustrated in the very definition of critical discourse analysis. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) define the broader term discourse analysis as a “research methodology within qualitative studies, which focus on the cultural meanings attached to people, artifacts, events, and experiences” (p. 227), while highlighting how the more specific critical discourse analysis “focuses on the ways that social and political dominance are reproduced in written texts and spoken language of individuals and institutions”
(p. 235). CDA, therefore, is concerned with evaluating how discourse – including written texts and artifacts – contributes to power and dominance struggles found within different groups. This struggle for power is at the core of hegemony; a topic which is a critical component in this study’s research question.

A second reason why critical discourse analysis is an appropriate design choice for this particular study is due to the fact that CDA requires an evaluation of multiple texts. In her COML 501 introduction of feminist critique and discourse analysis, Dr. Alexa Dare states “as a researcher using CDA you will need to pick several texts or artifacts to analyze. CDA almost always looks at more than one text because you want to be able to look for themes that emerge across multiple texts” (2008, p. 3). This study seeks to analyze the lyrical texts of multiple female country musicians in order to get a more varied perspective of the techniques used by these current artists in challenging gender roles. Unlike other similar research methodologies (such as rhetorical criticism) that focus on deconstructing a single text and do not necessarily engage in questions of power, critical discourse analysis proves to best align with a study, such as this one, that wishes to analyze a collection of texts in order to find common themes.

A third and final reason why critical discourse analysis was chosen as the preferred research design for this study is based on this method’s real-world applicability (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This study is focusing on gender themes found in popular country music; a topic that effects a much wider population than just those individuals found in academia or members of a specific organization. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) explain how research that utilizes CDA often results in “making direct recommendations about change” and “involves the production of critique towards current practices” (p. 241). Critical discourse analysis allows for change to occur as a result of a study, and does not simply offer an explanation for why things
are the way they are. “Critical theories, thus also CDA, want to produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7). Gaining a deeper understanding of the discourse used by modern female country musicians and how that discourse can be used to oppose hegemonic thought is at the core of this particular study. The goal of this research, through the use of critical discourse analysis, will shed light on how the medium of popular music written by female artists portrays ideologies of gender, and how these representations can positively affect the greater power struggle between women and men.

**Sampling**

Just as critical discourse analysis is a unique, multidisciplinary method of research, so too are they ways in which CDA data is sampled (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Neuman (2006) explains, “qualitative researchers focus less on a sample’s representativeness than on how the sample or small collection of cases, units, or activities illuminates social life” (p. 219). This statement certainly holds true regarding the sampling approach of many CDA researchers. In fact, many experts agree “most of the approaches to CDA do not explicitly recommend sampling procedures” but rather “rely on existing texts, such as mass media, communication, or documents” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 27). In this case, the existing texts are song lyrics from current female country music megastars, Carrie Underwood and Miranda Lambert (listed as appendix A).

The particular artists and song lyrics were chosen based on a purposive sampling method. Neuman (2006) defines purposive sampling as “a nonrandom sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population” (p. 222). After Underwood and Lambert were chosen as the subjects of this
study (as previously noted), the researcher carefully reviewed the artist’s catalogues in search for songs with lyrical discourse that, on the surface, appear to challenge traditional gender roles. Particular emphasis was placed on choosing songs with lyrics that outwardly seem to celebrate power, violence, and/or dominance; all of which are characteristics typically associated with men and masculinity.

**Instrumentation & Procedures**

Knowing that critical discourse analysis does not strictly enforce a particular way in which data is sampled, it comes as no surprise to learn that the instrumentation and procedures for this methodology are also adaptable based on individual research interests. While Wodak and Meyer (2009) highlight six specific, varied approaches to conducting CDA, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) note a more generic three-dimensional approach to critical discourse analysis that is rooted in Fairclough’s initial CDA theory. The later, three-step approach of measuring data is the chosen approach for this particular study.

The first level of analysis is decoding the very texts themselves (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Using the chosen song lyrics the researcher will look for: word choice (with particular emphasis on gendered words), patterns in vocabulary, and the ways in which the text and the text structure work together to develop information. The second level of analysis is investigating the discursive practices used within the chosen texts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The researcher will then document the speech acts, coherence, and intertextuality of the chosen country music song lyrics. The third and final level of CDA analysis is identifying the larger, social practices found within the texts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). For the purposes of this research project the researcher will then analyze and explain the ideological effects of the selected texts, with special regard to gender roles, while further noting how these ideologies manifest into greater
hegemonic gender processes within society. All data for this study will be collected in the form of direct quotes from the sampled texts.

It is important to note the significant role the aforementioned communication theories play in informing the analysis of this study. In order to illustrate how the discursive data translates into greater ideology and/or subtle hegemony, the researcher will rely heavily on concepts found within cultural studies, encoding and decoding theory, and feminist communication theory. Each of these examples highlight the significance of media in individual’s lives, as well as the powerful role forms of media play in shaping culture, which in turn shape ideologies and greater hegemonic viewpoints. Therefore, when using critical discourse analysis it is crucial for the researcher to view the discursive patterns found within the analyzed texts through a theoretical lens in order to exhibit how discourse and ideology are interwoven.

**Ethical Consideration**

Critical discourse analysis is considered a highly ethical form of research in and of itself since a major objective of CDA is to uncover power struggles between social groups and give voice to the oppressed and underrepresented. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) support this notion: “performing CDA, therefore, is a moral project, as it impinges on uncovering the ways and forms of power relations and ideologies” (p. 237). Through the process of identifying and uncovering ideologies and power relations in everyday communication, critical discourse analysis provides many positive ethical benefits. While CDA may not pose any of the traditional negative participant ethical concerns associated with other methodologies (such as surveys or focus groups), it is important to note that, even with the purest intentions there are still some ethical risks involved.
The largest ethical considerations that will surround this particular research study will be the researcher’s ability to properly acknowledging her own personal biases. Wodak and Meyer (2009) caution, “CDA researchers have to be aware that their own work is driven by social, economic, and political motives like any other academic work and that they are not in any privileged position” (p. 7). Since the end results and research quality of a CDA research project are dependent upon the researcher, it is important to be as transparent as possible, regarding ones personal biases, within the text of the final report. Therefore it behooves the researcher to acknowledge that she identifies her gender as female and has had a history of working in country music radio. Additionally, she personally hopes to see many of the gender ideologies and hegemony present in mass media more openly challenged and resisted. By being forthcoming and acknowledging personal biases in a transparent manner, the researcher can ensure stronger, more ethical results flourish from this study.
Chapter 4: The Study Analysis and Results

Introduction

In order to best address the research questions outlined in chapter two, the researcher employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to evaluate the following texts. Since critical discourse analysis primarily focuses on the ways in which power is gained and maintained in society through language, this method should be beneficial in examining how contemporary female country musicians strive to challenge mainstream hegemonic gender role through their lyrical discourse. Understanding the ways women use their voice, particularly in popular music, as a tool to both challenge and reinforce hegemony can be deeply meaningful in the quest for equality among genders.

The following research suggests that there are indeed contemporary female country artists who actively engage in discourse that challenges stereotypical gender roles. Much of this opposition is rooted in aggressive, violent discourse that is often associated with male behavior, especially in the realm of country music (Pruitt, 2007). Furthermore, the following critical discourse analyses also indicate that while these female artists actively challenge hegemonic feminine gender roles they are simultaneously reinforcing hegemonic masculine gender roles. This chapter concludes with a discussion on what this trend may mean for the future of women in country music and the effectiveness of this practice in changing mainstream thought on gender roles, ultimately resulting in changing culture.

The Study

Case Study 1: “Before He Cheats”

Hailing from her 2005 debut album Some Hearts, Carrie Underwood’s megahit single “Before He Cheats” is the first text to be analyzed in this study. This song, which was honored
with an array of awards and nominations, remained on the Billboard Country charts for a staggering 41 weeks, peaking at the number one spot (Billboard, 2012a). It is important to note that the lyrics, though made famous by Carrie Underwood’s powerful vocal delivery, were written by two men – Josh Kear and Chris Tompkins. Due to its extreme popularity, it is obvious that the subject matter of this song not only resonated with its audience, but is also worthy of further, critical examination.

From the first moment one listens to Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” it becomes instantly clear that this song is one about love, infidelity, revenge, and jealousy. The singer is fantasizing about all the things her former lover is doing with a “bleached-blond tramp”, who is unmistakably the other woman of this narrative (Kear & Tompkins, 2005). Underwood laments that the two are probably slow dancing, drinking fruity alcoholic beverages, sexily playing pool, and “getting frisky” (Kear & Tompkins, 2005). Though initially it may seem that this song is yet another example of love gone wrong/“hurtin’ love” that is common in country music (Wilson, 2000), the tone of the artist quickly changes from melancholy to rage. The listener soon hears Underwood sing about how her rage manifests into acts of explicit violence against her ex. It is this very prominent and reoccurring violent discourse that seems to be the real theme of this text; a theme that challenges typical feminine discourse found in country music (Pruitt, 2007).

Listeners of “Before He Cheats” hear Underwood sing about four specific, violent acts that she carries out against her former partner. The artist recalls how she:

1. Keys his car – “I dug my key into the side of his pretty little souped-up 4 wheel drive”
2. Carves her name into the car’s leather seats – “Carved my name in to his leather seat”
3. Bashes out both headlights with a baseball bat – “I took a Louisville slugger to both headlights”
4. Slashes all four of the vehicle’s tires – “Slashed a hole in all 4 tires” (Kear & Tompkins, 2005)

Each of these acts is destructive in its own right, but when combined the lyrics paint a mental picture of a car that is completely cosmetically totaled by this woman. Underwood declares, as if firing a warning sign, “Maybe next time he’ll think before he cheats” (Kear & Tompkins, 2005). Such aggressive and violent behavior is quite contrary to the traditionally represented woman in country music, the southern lady (Witte, 2008).

When combined, the lines of discourse of the previous examples create the chorus of the song “Before He Cheats”. The chorus is the only part of the song that is repeated, with Underwood singing it a total of three times in the three minutes and 20 seconds of the song. She uses the phrase “he cheats” a total of six times. Because of this, these lines are highlighted as the most important, and as a result most remembered, coded messages of the song. Listeners are able to decode these messages as meaning two main points: 1. men cheat and 2. women use violence and aggression as a means of revenge.

**Case Study 2: “Gunpowder and Lead”**

The second text that is analyzed in this study is Miranda Lambert’s “Gunpowder and Lead”, off of her second studio album *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Much like the previously studied song, “Gunpowder and Lead” spent significant time on the Billboard Country charts - 31 weeks, but peaked at only the seventh spot (Billboard, 2012b). However, unlike Underwood’s “Before He Cheats”, Lambert is credited with co-writing this song with fellow female country songwriter Heather Little. The fast paced, aggressive country tempo and overtly masculine themes of this song create a new paradigm in the realm of contemporary women’s country music.
“Gunpowder and Lead” too has overt themes of violence and revenge. Lambert sings about a woman who’s abusive husband just posted bail and is on his way home from jail. She declares that he “slapped my face and he shook me like a rag doll”, which presumably is why he was incarcerated (Lambert & Little, 2008). The character in the song has finally had enough and is ready to stand up to her abusive lover, fighting fire with fire. She rushes to get home before her abuser so that she may greet him by the door with her shotgun and shoot him.

The chorus of this song, which is repeated three times during in three minutes and 12 seconds, conveys the most important coded messages found in “Gunpowder and Lead”. Listeners hear discourse that is laced with themes traditionally thought of as masculine, being sung about and carried out by a woman. Lambert (2008) sings:

I'm goin' home, gonna load my shotgun
Wait by the door and light a cigarette
He wants a fight well now he's got one
He ain't seen me crazy yet
Slapped my face and he shook me like a rag doll
Don't that sound like a real man
I'm gonna show him what a little girl's made of
Gun powder and lead

The chorus highlights five attributes: violence, grit, aggression, sarcasm, toughness that particularly challenge gender ideologies of femininity found both in the genre of country music, and in society as a whole. First, by stating she’s going to load her shotgun, Lambert proclaims to her audience that she is prepared to act violently, with the use of a firearm, to resolve her situation. Second, the act of lighting a cigarette and smoking conveys that she is more than just a
dainty housewife and mother; she is gritty and rough like her male counterpart. Third, Lambert (2008) is unapologetic is demonstrating her aggression when she states “He wants a fight well now he's got one”. Proving that she is not willing to passively sit back, but rather fight her lover. Fourth, Lambert employs sarcasm when she asks her audience if abusing a woman makes her lover sound like a “real man”. It is easy to sense her insincerity and mocking tone when she makes this statement. This tactic of sarcasm is again used in the discourse of this song when Lambert refers to herself as a “little girl”. On the surface it seems strange for a grown woman to call herself a little girl, especially in light of the other, very mature, adult themes present in this text. However, the subtext suggests Lambert is employing sarcasm when she sings: “I'm gonna show him what a little girl's made of, gunpowder and lead” (Lambert & Little, 2008). This discourse is Lambert’s way of challenging, and even mocking, the traditional expression that “little girls are made of sugar, and spice, and everything nice”. Finally, by broadcasting that little girls are made of “gunpowder and lead” Lambert is telling the audience of her text that girls and women are tough; so tough in fact, they are composed of the same materials found in guns and ammunition.

It is interesting to note that both the male and female characters in this text are partaking in acts of domestic violence. Lambert (2008) sings “His fist is big but my gun's bigger, He'll find out when I pull the trigger”. The act of domestic violence is often perceived by the man being the furious aggressor and the woman being the helpless victim. Interestingly, in the case of “Gunpowder and Lead”, the two individuals can be classified as both the abuser and victim - the man using his hands and physical strength as weapons and Lambert using an actual weapon, a firearm. It is important to highlight, however, that Lambert’s character is partaking in an act of justified violence. Her behavior, while still violent and classified as domestic abuse, is used as a
means of revenge against her partner. Quite contrary, the physical abuse caused by the male character in this song is completely unjustified, stemming from what listeners can only assume to be his need to be the more powerful, more dominate person in the relationship. The discourse illustrates that this need for showing power is taken quite literally, resulting in the male character slapping, shaking, and using his fists on Lambert. Though the subject matter of this song revolves around the issue of domestic violence, whereas “Before He Cheats” deals with infidelity, the listeners of this text are able to again decode two very similar messages found within the discourse: 1. men are abusive and crave dominance and 2. women are pushed to violence as a means of self-defense and revenge.

Results

Challenging Feminine Ideology

The lyrics of “Before He Cheats” and “Gunpowder and Lead” combine to create a discourse that challenges typical views of femininity in country music, views that are often associated with hegemony - the undetected dominance of one social group over another. Underwood and Lambert both use their voices to sing about a new type of country woman, one who is unafraid to show her strength, defiance, and even violent behavior. This new woman is quite contrary to the southern lady illustrated in country music of the past. While also praised for her strength, the idealized southern lady of country music embodies more ideological feminine attributes such as fidelity to her man, family, and friends, manners, and gentleness (Witte, 2008, p.17). This new country woman, with her aggressive discourse, is much more similar to the rebellious men of country music that are often required to prove their manhood by “acting aggressively to compensate and meet expectations of hegemonic masculinity” (Pruitt, 2007, p. 88). Through their aggressive actions, the women in the Underwood and Lambert songs are
being empowered by acting *un*-ladylike. By portraying these very values in the discourse of their chart-topping, hit songs, Underwood and Lambert are then challenging what it means to be a woman in the field of country music.

In addition to demonstrating qualities and behaviors typically associated with masculinity, another way in which these texts challenge ideological feminine gender roles is found in the fact that neither of these women are relying on men to rescue or save them. While the fantasy of the sweet country woman being rescued by her cowboy is still alive and well in the discourse presented by some artists such as Taylor Swift or The Dixie Chicks (see Appendices C & D), Underwood and Lambert represent independent, self-reliant women in their songs “Before He Cheats” and “Gunpowder and Lead”. This autonomous attitude is most often reflected in the texts of country music’s male artists, not the female artists (Moncrief, 2004b). Underwood resolves her issues by destroying her former lover’s car and ultimately leaving him stating “‘Cause the next time that he cheats, You know it won't be on me” (Kear & Tompkins, 2005). Lambert finds closure in her situation by standing up to her abusive partner and not just leaving him, but shooting him. This type of discourse is completely contradicts the “Stand By Your Man” conservative attitude of Tammy Wynette, who is regarded as the First Lady of Country Music.

**Reinforcing Feminine Ideology**

While the discourse present in Underwood and Lambert’s songs can be viewed as a valuable tool for empowering women and challenging gender hegemony, it would be biased to omit that these songs do, in some ways, also promote some of the very feminine ideologies they are trying to combat. This is particularly true in the lyrics of “Before He Cheats”. While we see how Underwood’s character challenges the myth of what it means to be a southern lady in
country music, the portrayal of the “other woman” in the song is rather stereotypical. Underwood refers to this woman as a “bleach-blonde tramp”, which conjures up a both a vivid mental picture of what the woman may look like and also some negative feminine stereotypes. Underwood is insinuating that the woman whom her boyfriend is cheating with must be a tacky, fake blonde and automatically categorizes her as promiscuous. This is problematic for two reasons; the first of which is this lyrical discourse projects that all blond women are “tramps” or seductresses. The second reason is that Underwood is assuming this other woman is actually aware that she’s flirting with an attached man. Underwood again reinforces the gendered ideology that women are the fairer, more dainty sex by singing that the other woman is probably drinking “some fruity little drink” and needs the man to show her how to play pool (Kear & Tompkins, 2005). These examples, minor as they seem, do dilute the overall effectiveness of the song’s abilities to challenge hegemonic thought.

**Reinforcing Masculine Ideology**

Interestingly enough, while the majority of the discourse analysis of the previous texts illustrates women in country music challenging dominant feminine ideology, they are simultaneously reinforcing masculine hegemony though this very same discourse. Both Underwood and Lambert represent the men in their songs in negative, hetronormative, stereotypical manners. “Before He Cheats” discusses a heterosexual, two-timing, unfaithful man on the hunt for this next sexual conquest. His sexual appetite is so large that he is not capable of being satisfied by Underwood alone, but rather is finding another woman to additionally be with. The discourse of this song also suggests that this man is a “man’s man” since he is straight, drinking in a bar, playing pool, and is into cars as evident by his “pretty little suped up four wheel drive” (Kear & Tompkins, 2005). The discourse in “Gunpowder and Lead” further
perpetuates dominant masculine hegemony by illustrating a tough, heterosexual man who is abusive to his woman. Lambert portrays this man as a violent criminal, and also notes his alcohol dependency as she sings that he’s “another six pack in” (Lambert & Little, 2008). Indeed this proves that both Underwood and Lambert are concerned only with challenging feminine gender hegemony, while neglecting to use their voices as a means to promote equality for all genders. Certainly not all men cheat or are physically abusive to their partners, yet these the only examples of what it means to be a “man” found within the discourse of these country music texts. Past research shows that the gendered ideology of men being powerful, promiscuous, and the primary subjects is celebrated in many genres of music, including country (Click & Kramer, 2007; Moncrief, 2004a; Moncrief, 2004b; Witte, 2008). But just as it is important for artists to challenge and combat outdated forms of feminine ideology, so too is it important for them to challenge and combat outdated forms of masculine ideology.

Unfortunately, in the case of Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” and Lambert’s “Gunpowder and Lead”, this was a missed opportunity.

**Songwriter’s Relationship**

Finally, it is important to consider the relationship between the sex of the songwriters and how gender ideologies were challenged or reinforced. Clearly both songs were made popular and commercially successful by the women who sang them; Underwood lending her voice to “Before He Cheats” and Lambert belting out “Gunpowder and Lead”. But what the casual listener does not realize is that the lyrics to “Before He Cheats” were written by two men: Josh Kear and Chris Tompkins, and the lyrics of “Gunpowder and Lead” were written by two women: Miranda Lambert and Heather Little. Supported by the previous examples, the lyrical discourse present in both songs challenge traditional views of femininity while reinforcing traditional,
negative views of masculinity. However, it is interesting to note that “Before He Cheats” also portrays the character of the “other woman” in a rather traditionally feminine way (blonde, girly, seductive). Perhaps this contradiction in simultaneously challenging and reinforcing female gender roles within the same song can be attributed to the fact that the lyrics were written by men, but sung by a woman. Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) make it clear the importance of women recounting and giving voice to their own, uniquely feminine experiences and perspective. They state “women’s storytelling is valuable for women in constructing their lives by giving shape to their experiences, creating community, by sharing their differences from and similarities with other women, giving witness to the forces that shape gender and women’s experiences, and telling the truth about their lives for the beneficial impact of talking about both painful and joyful experiences” (p. 103). Knowing this, it seems clearer as to why “Gunpowder and Lead” consistently challenges feminine hegemony throughout; the discourse is written by women, for women. The discourse is more authentic. Whereas “Before He Cheats”, while still challenging feminine hegemony, also reinforces aspects of traditional femininity; the discourse is written by men, for women.

Discussion

The discourse present in the contemporary country music lyrics of female artists has proven to be a complex, multidimensional, and powerful medium of expression. Rogers (2004) reminds that “discourse functions to reproduce society (through its social structures, relationships, and value structures) but also has a hand in transforming society as people use discourse in creative and agentic ways” (p. 7). This is certainly true in the case of the highlighted female artists. They are using their songs, lyrics, and female voices as tools for social change. This idea is supported by the feminist communication theory of Rakow and
Wackwitz (2004): “women, with or without the impetus of feminism, have been telling their stories as a means to heal and make change – whether or not feminist scholars have been there to hear and record them” (p. 103). In the cases of Carrie Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” and Miranda Lambert’s “Gunpowder and Lead” the audience is shown the ways in which these artists have chosen to challenge what is means to be and act like a woman in country music; to challenge the very ideology that creates gendered hegemonic thought.

The discourse in the previous texts illustrate resistance of traditional feminine ideology that is overt and unapologetic. Underwood and Lambert do not use these songs as a way to subtly oppose traditional feminine attributes, like passivity and compliance. Rather, they boldly share how the female characters in these texts actively take control of the situations in their lives. The way that Lambert and Underwood so transparently present discourse which opposes ideas associated with traditional femininity is, in and of itself, counter to how the very notion of hegemony works. Cultural hegemony is subtle and easily undetected by the average person. These texts blatantly illustrate two women who are regaining control of their lives over men. There is a gendered struggle for power present in both texts: Lambert with her abusive male partner and Underwood with her unfaithful boyfriend. The struggle for power and dominance between two groups, in the case of this research woman versus man and/or feminine versus masculine, is at the heart of hegemony. Russ (2007) reminds us that prevalent media hegemony “impacts the way we understand the world and our place in it” (p.1). Knowing this, it becomes critical that the media individuals consume, including popular country music, offers a varied perspective of what femininity can act and look like. In “Before He Cheats” and “Gunpowder and Lead”, Underwood and Lambert are trying to do just that.
There is still an enormous amount of work to be done to change existing hegemonic thought regarding gender equality, not only by female country musicians but by musicians of all genders and genres. This change cannot happen overnight, nor can it happen through the discursive resistance of one or two artists. Since ideological gender norms are so deeply rooted in all aspects of culture, including music, this shift in thinking will begin slow and gain momentum over time. It will require the support of all artists, regardless of gender. This study shows, however, that tides are changing and popular female country musicians are making a conscientious effort to resist outdated feminine ideology.
Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

This study aims to examine how the wildly popular genre of country music communicates issues of gender hegemony and ideology through the lyrical discourse of its female artists. The researcher used critical discourse analysis as the method in which the Carrie Underwood and Miranda Lambert texts were dissected in order to answer the following questions:

1. How do contemporary female country music artists challenge hegemonic feminine gender roles in their lyrics?
2. How do contemporary female country music artists reinforce hegemonic masculine gender roles in their lyrics?
3. Through the assertion of voice, do female country musicians effectively challenge hegemony?

While interesting data was gathered from the case studies presented in this thesis, this study, like all others, will benefit from additional, deeper analysis of female country musicians and the important role they play in combating and accepting dominant views of gender.

Limitations of Study

A major limitation of this study is that it investigates only the written discourse of female country artists, and does not investigate hegemonic issues rooted in rhetoric or content found in visual communication such as music video. While the written words of these artists provided complex texts to analyze through CDA, it is important to remember that hegemony operates in many different ways, utilizing many different tools in order to promote the power by some. All forms of mass media, including music video and advertisements, can be used by these female artists in order to promote or resist gendered hegemonic thought, and thus must be considered.
Further, this study is limited by the fact that it researched discourse made popular by heterosexual women country artists, and did not take into account the homosexual or queer perspective, the male perspective, or the perspective from any other musical genres such as rock, hip-hop, pop, or R&B. Fundamental concepts of hegemony, such as dominance and power struggle, are present in the music of not only women, but of men as well; they are present not only in country music, but all other contemporary musical genres.

A final limitation of this particular thesis can be found in the fact that only two different texts were examined. In order to develop a more robust argument about how female country artists are simultaneously challenging and reinforcing dominant gender ideology in their lyrics, more texts by these artists must be examined. Both Lambert and Underwood have a large catalogues of music, and through examining additional texts over a longer period of time, the researcher would be able to identify additional patterns and tactics used by these women to illustrate what is means to be “feminine” or “masculine”.

**Further Study Recommendations**

As evident by the previous limitations section, there are many areas that can be improved and expanded upon for future studies relating to gender, hegemony, and country music. A particularly interesting recommendation for a future study would be to compare and contrast the gender discourse in the lyrics of classic female country musicians (such as Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, or June Carter Cash) with contemporary female country musicians (such as Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert, Taylor Swift). While the scope of this study would be much broader and the time required to complete it would be longer, the researcher would have a more comprehensive view of how women in country music have (or have not) evolved their lyrics over the years in order to resist dominant ideology in terms of gender.
Analyzing the lyrical discourse of female songwriters whose work is sung by strictly female artists, or male songwriters whose work is sung by strictly male artists (which is often not always the case, as evident by Underwood’s ‘Before He Cheats’) would be another suggestion for future studies in the field. Such a study would provide valuable insight into how construction of femininity by female artists and masculinity by male artists goes undetected in popular music, and how this translates into these perspectives becoming naturalized in popular culture. This would also provide the opportunity for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the use of voice and shared gendered perspective in country music.

Conclusions

This study highlights the complex ways in which gender ideologies operate in the media, thus creating cultural norms and greater hegemonic power of one gender over another. Both Underwood and Lambert give voice to women who been marginalized at the hands of the men in their life. These women are empowered by assuming qualities that are traditionally associated with men: strength, aggression, and independence. Prior research concludes one of the ways hegemony is “put into action in media offerings is through the use of dominant archetypes or ‘stock’ characters” (Russ, 2007, p.1). Representing the women of these songs in a way that counters these dominant archetypes and stock characters is particularly important since it offers the audience of these songs an alternative perspective of what it means to be feminine/female.

The lyrics of “Before He Cheats” and “Gunpowder and Lead” both challenge hegemonic feminine gender roles through portraying female characters as powerful individuals. Through the use of Hall’s encoding/decoding theory, the discourse present in these songs depict the main female characters partaking in acts of violence as a means of revenge against their male lovers. These actions are quite contrary to the behaviors of the traditional southern lady celebrated in
country music of years past. Furthermore, the lyrical discourse in both texts seems to reinforce negative aspects of masculinity in the male characters. Underwood and Lambert sing about men who are abusive, unfaithful, and immoral. This is problematic for many reasons, the most obvious of which is not all men are abusive, unfaithful, or immoral; though this is how they are being portrayed in the songs of contemporary female country musicians.

Out of the two texts, Lambert’s “Gunpowder and Lead” seems to be most consistent and authentic in resisting traditional feminine ideology, since the discourse was written by women for women. This suggests there may be a link to the effectiveness of discourse in challenging gender ideologies and the gender of the discourse’s authors. In “Before He Cheats” Underwood also offers clear examples of her character resisting traditional aspects of femininity, though the effects of this discourse is lessened as she describes the “other woman” in a more ideal, feminine manner. These contradictions may be linked to the fact that this discourse was written by men, for a woman artist. As suggested above, more research needs to be done regarding the effectiveness of anti-hegemonic discourse and how the ideological message is altered based on discourse being written by one gender (i.e. males) and presented by an artist of a different gender (i.e. females).

In conclusion, this study explores how modern female country musicians use their lyrics as tools for challenging dominant, hegemonic gender roles in culture. A common discursive theme of the texts was women partaking in acts of violence as a coping mechanism and method of retaliation against the men who have wronged them. It has been found that the current women of country music are deliberately challenging feminine gender ideology while simultaneously reinforcing masculine gender ideology. Deeper investigation in the areas of gender, hegemony, and country music will ultimately result in a deeper understanding of how these powerful
cultural forces shape and govern taken for granted ideology and subtle hegemony in the lives of all individuals.
References


APPENDIX A

Carrie Underwood Lyrics Sample

“Before He Cheats”
Carrie Underwood

Right now he's probably slow dancing
With a bleach blonde tramp
And she's probably getting frisky
Right now he's probably buying her some fruity little drink
'Cause she can't shoot whiskey
Right now he's probably up behind her with a pool-stick showing her how to shoot a combo
And he don't know

(Chorus)

That I dug my key into the side of his pretty little suped up four wheel drive
Carved my name into his leather seats
took a Louisville slugger to both headlights
Slashed a hole in all four tires
Maybe next time he'll think before he cheats

Right now, she's probably up singing some white-trash version
Of Shania karaoke
Right now she's probably saying I'm drunk and he's thinking that he's gonna get lucky
Right now, he's probably dabbing on 3 dollars worth of that bathroom polo
And he don't know

(Repeat Chorus)

I might saved a little trouble for the next girl
'Cause the next time that he cheats
You know it won't be on me!
No not on me

(Chorus)
“Last Name”
Carrie Underwood

Last night I got served a little bit too much of that poison baby
Last night I did things I’m not proud of and I got a little crazy
Last night I met a guy on the dance floor and I let him call me baby

(Chorus)

And I don’t even know his last name
Oh my Mama would be so ashamed
It started off “Hey, Cutie where you from?”
And then it turned into “Oh, no, what have I done?”
And I don’t even know his last name

We left the club right around three o’clock in the morning
His pinto sittin there in the parking lot, well it should’ve been a warning
I had no clue what I was getting into so I blame it on the Cuervo
Oh, where did my manners go?

(Chorus)

Today I woke up thinking ‘bout Elvis somewhere in Vegas I’m not sure
How I got here or how this ring on my left hand just appeared outta nowhere
I gotta go, I take the chips and the pinto and hit the road they say what happens here stays here
all of this’ll disappear …there’s just one little problem

I don’t even know my last name
Oh my Mama would be so ashamed
It started off “Hey, Cutie where are you from?”
Turned into “Oh no what have I done?”
I don’t even know my last name
APPENDIX B

Miranda Lambert Lyrics Sample

“Gunpowder and Lead”
Miranda Lambert

County Road 233 under my feet
Nothin' on this white rock but little ol' me
I got two miles till he makes bail
And if I'm right we're headed straight for hell

(Chorus)
I'm goin' home, gonna load my shotgun
Wait by the door and light a cigarette
He wants a fight well now he's got one
He ain't seen me crazy yet
Slapped my face and he shook me like a rag doll
Don't that sound like a real man
I'm gonna show him what a little girl's made of
Gun powder and lead

Well it's half past ten
Another six pack in
I can feel the rumble like the cold black wind
He pulls in the drive
Gravel flies
He don't know what's waitin' here this time

(Chorus)

His fist is big but my gun's bigger
He'll find out when I pull the trigger

I'm goin' home, gonna load my shotgun
Wait by the door and light a cigarette
He wants a fight well now he's got one
And he ain't seen me crazy yet
Slapped my face and he shook me like a rag doll
Don't that sound like a real man
I'm gonna show him what a little girl's made of
Gun powder and gun powder and lead
Gun powder and lead
“Crazy Ex-Girlfriend”
Miranda Lambert

It took me five bars some thirty license plates
I saw her mustang and my eyes filled up with rage
I brought my pistol but I ain’t some kind of fool
So I walked right in bare-handed
She was on his arm while he was playing pool
Just like I used to do
She kissed him while I got a beer
She didn't think I'd show up here
I'm a crazy ex-girlfriend

I watched her for awhile but I didn't like her walk
She came across kinda cheap to me but hey how's that my fault
She looked at my man like he didn't have on a stitch
Somebody tell that girl to step up to the plate I'm gonna pitch
Those pretty girls can play their game
But their damn well gonna know my name
I'm a crazy ex-girlfriend

I started throwing things and I scared folks half to death
I got up in his face 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
I was mad as hell
Those pretty girls they're all the same
But their damn well gonna know my name

I'm a crazy ex-girlfriend
I'm a crazy ex-girlfriend
I'm a crazy ex-girlfriend
APPENDIX C

Taylor Swift Sample Lyrics

We were both young when I first saw you.
I close my eyes and the flashback starts:
I'm standing there on a balcony in summer air.

See the lights, see the party, the ball gowns.
See you make your way through the crowd
And say, "Hello,"
Little did I know...

That you were Romeo, you were throwing pebbles,
And my daddy said, "Stay away from Juliet"
And I was crying on the staircase
Begging you, "Please don't go"
And I said...

Romeo, take me somewhere we can be alone.
I'll be waiting; all that's left to do is run.
You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess,
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes".

So I sneak out to the garden to see you.
We keep quiet 'cause we're dead if they knew
So close your eyes... escape this town for a little while.
Oh, oh.

'cause you were Romeo - I was a scarlet letter,
And my daddy said, "Stay away from Juliet"
But you were everything to me,
I was begging you, "Please don't go"
And I said...

Romeo, take me somewhere we can be alone.
I'll be waiting; all that's left to do is run.
You'll be the prince and I'll be the princess.
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes".

Romeo, save me, they're trying to tell me how to feel.
This love is difficult but it's real.
Don't be afraid, we'll make it out of this mess.
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes".

Oh, oh.
I got tired of waiting
Wondering if you were ever coming around.
My faith in you was fading
When I met you on the outskirts of town.
And I said...

Romeo, save me, I've been feeling so alone.
I keep waiting for you but you never come.
Is this in my head? I don't know what to think.
He knelt to the ground and pulled out a ring and said...

Marry me, Juliet, you'll never have to be alone.
I love you, and that's all I really know.
I talked to your dad – go pick out a white dress
It's a love story, baby, just say, "Yes".

Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.

'cause we were both young when I first saw you
APPENDIX D

Dixie Chick Sample Lyrics

I said I wanna touch the earth I wanna break it in my hands
I wanna grow something wild and unruly
I wanna sleep on the hard ground in the comfort of your arms
On a pillow of blue bonnets in a blanket made of stars

Oh it sounds good to me
I said

Cowboy take me away fly this girl as high as you can into the wild blue
Set me free oh I pray closer to heaven above and closer to you
Closer to you

I wanna walk and not run, I wanna skip and not fall
I wanna look at the horizon, and not see a building standing tall
I wanna be the only one, for miles and miles
Except for maybe you, and your simple smile

Oh it sounds good to me, yes it sounds so good to me,

Cowboy take me away, fly this girl as high as you can into the wild blue
Set me free, oh, I pray, closer to heaven above, and closer to you
Closer to you

I said, I wanna touch the earth, I wanna break it in my hands
I wanna grow something wild and unruly

Oh it sounds so good to me,

Cowboy take me away, fly this girl as high as you can into the wild blue
Set me free, oh, I pray, closer to heaven above, and closer to you
Closer to you

Closer to you, cowboy take me away, closer to you
Mentor Agreement Form

You have been asked to serve as a Mentor for Ashley Richards, who is completing the requirements for her/his Masters Degree in Communication and Leadership Studies. As a mentor you are asked to share ideas with this student and read the next to final draft of their thesis. You are not expected to directly supervise this student’s work but rather meet with them as a “young colleague.” If you are willing to serve as a Mentor for him/her, please sign this agreement.

I am willing to serve as a Mentor for Ashley Richards as she/he completes her/his thesis. I realize I do not need to supervise their work in any direct fashion and will only serve as a more experienced colleague with a younger colleague. I will provide help in the way of suggestions, ideas and resources and am willing to review drafts of their written work. I also agree to read the next to last draft of the student’s thesis and will sign my name on the title page of their final draft. My signature on the thesis only indicates that I have read it and is no indication of the quality of the work. I will not be asked to assign a grade or make any evaluative comments to the course convener.

Signature: (Alexa Dare)

Title: Adjunct Assistant Professor, COML

Email and telephone number: darea@gonzaga.edu; 406.274.6377

Date: September 7, 2012