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**An Examination of the Rise and Reception of Female  
Country Crossover Artists from 1990**

Caroline Eileen Anderson

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

The University of Huddersfield

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## Abstract

Historically, women in country music have not received levels of radio airtime or chart success in line with that of their male counterparts. However, during the 1990s, female country music artists saw perhaps their highest levels of success and radio airtime. Country music artists are increasingly becoming 'crossover artists', who leave their country music roots to find success in popular music markets. Country music is a genre that is male dominated in every aspect including production, chart success, festival appearances and many other areas. It is therefore significant that so many female artists cross over to popular music markets when they begin to find success in country music.

This thesis examines the reasons why particular artists have become crossover artists and determines why women often become excluded from the country music narrative. It focuses on female artists who become crossover artists, moving both from country music into popular music and popular music into country music. By looking at the many political, cultural and social aspects that are ingrained in the history of country music, this thesis determines the perception of women in the genre and why women are often not included in country music discussion. This leads to lack of inclusion and acceptance of women within the genre and subsequent lack of success within the genre's charts.

The following tracks and artists are discussed in detail:

Sheryl Crow 'All I Wanna Do' (Bottrell, Baerwald, Gilbert, Crow & Cooper, 1993)

The Chicks 'Not Ready to Make Nice' (Maguire, Maines, Robison & Wilson, 2006)

Bebe Rexha 'Meant to Be' (Garcia, Hubbard, Miller & Rexha, 2017)

Maren Morris 'The Middle' (Aarons et al., 2018)

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis will look at the idea of crossover artists, particularly in relation to American country music. Shuker (2017) describes crossover as, 'the move of a record/performer from success in one genre/chart area to another, usually one with a more mainstream audience' (p.83). For the purpose of this study, similar to Shuker's (2017) definition, a crossover artist is defined as an artist who begins their career in one genre before finding success in another but perhaps not always having a more mainstream audience. The 1990s in particular was a time of global success for many country crossover artists. More recently, crossover artists continue to be successful and challenge strict genre rules that are often in place for artists belonging originally in the country music genre. This thesis discusses questions surrounding crossover artists through a series of case studies looking at; Sheryl Crow, The Chicks, Bebe Rexha and Maren Morris.

There are many aspects to consider when looking at crossover artists. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly to country music is the idea of an artist's authenticity in relation to their genre. This is interlinked with the idea of an artist's perception. Particularly in country music, the perception of an artist and the way in which they govern themselves can have an impact on the success of their music. This thesis will focus particularly on the perception and authenticity of women in the genre and determines if the perception of an artist changes as they become a crossover artist.

This thesis will also determine why artists become crossover artists, examining female artists who crossover from country music into popular music mass markets but also popular music artists who try to find success in country music genres. Fenster (1988) defines crossover as 'an artist that while reaching a broader audience, retains and builds upon the original audience' (p. 288). I will look at this in further detail and determine if female country artists retain a majority of their original audience as they become crossover artists. Success is also a key concept when looking at crossover artists. It can be difficult to determine what success looks like in recorded music and can take into account many factors including; artist perception, commercial success and chart data. The idea of artist collaboration is also a focus of this thesis. It is evident through my case studies that often,



established artists from two different genres collaborate in order to establish themselves in the other artist's genre.

The impact of gender disparity in country music as a genre will also be discussed while looking at the impact of this on country music artists. A lack of female representation can be found in many areas of music. Perhaps due to the traditional values associated with the rural Southern states of America, often women can be perceived to be inferior to men both in their role in their household but also musically. This thesis will discuss some of the barriers women face in the genre that create the lack of representation of women in country music with direct reference to crossover country artists in particular.

I have selected several case studies in order to answer my research questions including; Sheryl Crow, The Chicks, Bebe Rexha and Maren Morris. These case studies are relatively contemporary ranging from the 1990s to current releases. The 1990s was an interesting time of change for country music with female musicians becoming increasingly popular and crossing over into popular music markets. The artists selected show how socio-political issues can affect artists in country music. The four case studies are all female artists as there is a general lack of women that reach the highest levels of chart positions in American country music, although this is also seen in other genres of music, it is interesting to look at how the success of these artists changes as they become crossover artists.

Chapter four presents a detailed examination of one commercially successful track from each case study artist, in order to provide a deep and holistic analysis of the ways in which their work embodies the concept of 'crossover' country. This allows an opportunity to look at the context and reception of the track alongside audio-visual analysis of the track and its accompanying video, drawing on the track and its context as a snapshot of the broader issues in the artist or group's full career.

## Chapter 2: Defining and Studying Country Music

There are many aspects which are important when looking at both country music and the idea of crossover artists, including the initial problem of defining both these terms in relation to the broader field of popular music and its study. Malone (1985) states, 'it defies precision, and no term (not even "country") has ever successfully encapsulated its essence' (p.1). The most identifiable features of country music include its close harmonies, story-telling lyrics and instrumentation that is specific to the genre, this will be discussed in depth later in this thesis. Shucker (2017) defines country music as 'an American metagenre now internationally popular; it has been variously known in the past as folk music, old-time music, hillybilly, C&W/ country & western. There are close links between popular music and country music although also several significant differences in their sound, culture, and reception. It is important to understand how popular music links to country music but also how country music differs from popular music in order to determine what a crossover artist looks like.

### Studying and Defining Popular Music

Popular music is a concept that does not have a universally recognised definition (Frith, 2001; Lena and Peterson, 2008). The question of what popular music is, is problematic in itself as any definition of the term must be 'socially and historically grounded' with the context often contributing to the decision of whether a song belongs in popular music or not (Middleton, 1990, p. 3). Popular music may contain different styles and, if viewed commercially, contains all contemporary music that is popular (Frith, 2001, p.94). Classifying popular music can also be viewed either musicologically, sociologically or a combination of the two (Frith, 1998, p.83). This again leads to the definition of popular music as a difficult concept as it can be viewed in a variation of ways and have a variety of meanings depending on the context that the music is to be studied in.

As with genre, discussed in detail later, the idea of the culture behind a song leading to it ultimately being classified in a particular genre is also prevalent in popular music study. Lena and Peterson (2008) propose that there is a difference between music that is

categorised as 'pure pop'; songs are marginally different but are at some point in *Billboard* Magazine's Hot 100 Singles Chart and other popular songs or genres that are popular for a short time but not classed as 'pure' pop. Pop charts will be a combination of both of these variations (p.700). Similarly, Frith (1998) proposes that in the UK, pure pop is viewed as singles that are at some point on the 'top of the pops' table and made for teenagers (p.83). Although *Top of the Pops* is a dated example of music that is popular in its time, the idea of a song being successful on a chart table is common in both the UK and USA definitions of pure pop. Another example of when a song is popular can often also be linked with the amount of radio play a song receives. Frith (1998) suggests that a difficulty in deciding if music is pure pop or not can arise when there is an overlap of songs that perhaps reach the charts but are not singles or made for teenagers so do not fully meet the criteria (p.83). This is one of the many difficulties when determining the songs that belong in popular music studies.

The idea of defining popular music has been a problem for musicologists, people who work in the music industry, music fans and government workers, where the definition of popular music is essential in the setting of legislation. The UK government, defined popular music as, 'characterised by a strong rhythmic element and a reliance on electronic amplification for their performance' (Broadcasting Act 1990, cited in Frith, 1998, p. 83). Again, a dated reference, however, this definition is entirely different from the definitions previously discussed by Lena and Peterson (2008) and Frith (1998) who do not mention either of the aspects the Broadcasting Act determines as making a pop song here. Again, leading to further confusion of what popular music is and what it is not. Middleton (1990) discusses two 'definitional syntheses' that can define what popular music is; positivist and sociological essentialism. The positivist view of popular music is quantitative and determines the music that is popular from looking at sales figures and commercial value. In this synthesis, music is classed as popular music if it is selling in large quantities and making a substantial commercial return. Middleton (1990) suggests that this could be disputable as in the time of writing, sales figures could be inaccurate and will be subject to change. The definition relies upon data that is produced about the music market and is open to corruption and gatekeeping issues that are discussed in detail later. Further, the data

does not measure popularity but only sales (p.5). The sociological essentialist view suggests that the style of music that is popular is consistent and can be identified, however, commercial popularity can change based on sociological factors (Middleton, 1990, p.4-6). Both of these ways of viewing popular music are problematic but all focus on dividing music into categories (Middleton, 1990, p. 6).

Frans Birrer (1985) attempted to define popular music with 4 definitions (p.104). Firstly, the normative definition which suggested popular music was an inferior type of music. Secondly, negative definition. Here, popular music is defined as not being something else, for example, folk or avant-garde music. The music is not another, specific type of music, therefore it must be popular music. The third definition is sociological where popular music is for or produced by a particular social group. Finally, technologic-economic definitions where popular music is part of a mass market. Middleton (1990) suggests that one of the problems of Birrer's definitions is that the categories do not address the fluidity of socioeconomic terms and also the fluidity of genre boundaries (p.4). Although addressing many of the ways music can be popular music, it does not directly reference charts as Lena and Peterson (2008) and Frith (1998) do. There is also no reference to the Broadcasting Act definition that music must be electronically amplified and have a strong rhythmic element, a definition that was used for legislation but also does not grasp the complexities of defining popular music.

It is clear from most research that popular music is a contestable term. As it can be viewed in a variety of approaches, the idea of genre and subgenres perhaps becomes more important as a way of grouping different styles of music more clearly. There is perhaps no way that popularity can be measured without a method that could be disputable. This leads to the difficulty of defining the term 'popular music' but also determining the music that belongs under the umbrella of popular music. Although perhaps an unpopular suggestion, the various arguments surrounding a track's acceptance in popular music leave many genres open to inclusion in a broader popular music definition. By some of the criteria mentioned above, most contemporary country music could belong within popular music.

## Defining Genre

Similar to the contestable definition of popular music, classifying music in a genre comes with difficulties that are observed when trying to decide if music belongs in a popular music category (Shuker, 2016, p.112). Genre is a very broad topic and although necessary to mention in my research due to the complexities surrounding acceptance in country music as a genre, it is not the focus of the study. Genre is important in both the study of music and for practical reasons including marketing and promotion of music. Genre can be simply described as a category or type of music (Shuker, 2017, p.148). Fabbri (2012) proposes that some musicologists deny the importance or necessity of genre, particularly in contemporary music scenes (p.8). This is contestable as music becomes increasingly more diverse. Perhaps the importance or necessity of a genre definition may hinder creativity, it is important in a field such as music that is so large to ensure music can be located by fans and people in the industry.

Simon Frith (1998) researches in depth the idea of genre in particular relation to popular music. Frith suggests that the reason for genre in music is often a commercial idea, in order to group music together for sales (p.75). Beyond this Frith suggests that there are two types of genre classification; genre for commercialism and genre for content. While content-driven music focuses on the sound that is being produced and the artistry of the music, commercialism focuses on the target market that the music is being produced for optimum profit (p.81). Often the two of these can intertwine as genre styles that are popular will also be commercial. Despite the suggestion above that some musicologists do not agree with the necessity for genre, labels are essential for music in order for songs to be easy to find, advertise and write about (Frith, 1998, p.83). So much of music's commercial success is based on publicity and therefore a journalist writing for a rock music magazine for example must be able to identify what music, at that time, is rock music. Frith (1998) argues that as there is no universally agreed definition of any genre, different industries may group songs in different ways. This has the potential to mean that consumers of the music, record labels, record stores and promoters could all have slightly varying views of what genre or subgenre a piece of music fits into (p.77).

David Brackett (2016) writes that genre classification began when certain similar items of the same form could not be placed in the same category. This can be noticed not only in music but in other fields such as literature and art (Brackett, 2016, p.3; Frith, 1998, p. 76; Shuker, 2016, p.112). Brackett suggests that a piece of work in a form of art, for example music, may be so different from another that genres were necessary to differentiate (p.3) Most musicologists agree that one of the key aspects of deciding the genre of a song is the context of the song, including the context of the lyrics, the background of the singer, and the boundaries that form the genre (Brackett, 2016, p. 280; Negus, 1999). There is much debate over what the context includes and what boundaries should be included in every genre (Shuker, 2016, p. 112). It could be argued that if a song were placed in a genre purely on how it sounded then it may be in an entirely different genre than the one it is actually in (Frith, 1998, p. 86). Wider cultural patterns that are considered when placing a song in a genre can include ethnicity, gender, class and geographical location (p.21). Culture is an important part of how songs are classified. Shuker (2017) proposes that often songs may share similar characteristics but their cultural context influences the genre the music is placed in (p. 148). This is particularly relevant when looking at American country music where many of the societal and cultural norms of Southern USA are reflected through a song's acceptance or lack of acceptance in the genre. Holt (2007) also suggests that race is often used to classify certain similar pieces of music (p.54). Discrimination against marginalised groups can influence genre formation and the reach any piece of music has (Lena and Peterson, 2008, p. 714).

Franco Fabbri (1981) presented pioneering research into musical genres and suggested that a musical genre was a set of events that could be predicted (p.52). Fabbri (1981) suggested that the classification of a song in any genre is based on five rules; formal or technical rules, semiotic rules, behavioural rules, social and ideological rules and commercial rules, he does, however, recognise that genre is too complex to be entirely sure of the completeness of his rules (p.54). The formal rules are based on the sound of the music and what a listener hears. Semiotic rules are about what story a song tells and how it tells this story. This idea may be best observed when looking at the lyrics particular stories can tell. Country music is famous

for the storytelling nature of song writing, featured below with an extract from 'Diane' by Cam

'I promise I didn't know he was your man  
I would've noticed a gold wedding band, Diane  
I'd rather you hate me than not understand  
Oh, Diane' (Ochs, Johnson & Bhasker, 2017)

Country music often depicts stories of heartbreak and torn relationships. This particular song, a response to Dolly Parton's 'Jolene' tells the apologetic story of a woman who did not know the man she was seeing had a wife (Garcia, 2020). Semiotic rules also apply to other genres for example inspirational lifestyle-changing lyrics in hip-hop music. The idea of a particular story within lyrics placing a particular song in a genre is discussed in detail later in relation to country music. The second of Fabbri's rules are behavioural rules and discuss how an artist behaves and the etiquette they display both on stage and in interviews. Social and ideological rules place an artist in a genre based on the image they portray as a person in society. Finally, commercial rules are based on the finances an artist can attract. With these many different aspects taken into account to place a song in a genre, it is perhaps no surprise that similarly sounding songs can be classified very differently. Fabbri acknowledged that although these rules are complete, they will never be able to adequately decide if a song fully fits in a genre and this proves the complexity of genre placement of a song. Fabbri also suggests that none of the rules are more important than the others, however, each genre may prioritise one of the rules over the others for a song to belong in that specific genre. This could also mean that some genres may ignore some of the rules Fabbri suggests (Fabbri, 1981, p. 55). Fabbri's definition of genre is also broad, however, this could be important so that the rules Fabbri proposes can apply to any genre, even if some genres value one rule over another. Simon Frith (1998) suggests that there are issues with these rules, perhaps most obvious is that genre is so fluid so the genre rules will also need to be fluid. This could be seen if a genre was not commercially successful but now is, a song that would have been part of this genre could no longer be. Frith suggests, similarly to

Fabbri, that some genres may value these rules more than others making the rules not a clear way of deciding genre (p. 94).

Lena (2012) presents the idea of four genre 'forms' that all music will fit into, some overlapping into more than one of the forms. The forms include; avant-garde, scene-based, industry-based and traditionalist. Avant-garde music is produced by artists creating new, often experimental and eccentric music with little press. Scene-based music is based in communities with local music being produced by local people, often not recorded and is covered by community press. Industry based music is focused on revenue and produces music that is made to be commercially valid. Finally, traditionalist music is a platform to preserve heritage (Lena and Peterson, 2008, p. 701; Lena 2012). New music that is influenced by old music is not traditionalist (Lena and Peterson, 2008) but often new music is measured against old music to see how it 'fits' (Frith, 1998, p.89). Our current knowledge of music that is popular is influenced by and indeed is impacted by our views of musical history. Some of musical history will always be forgotten, music that has been created but not recorded or music that was not popular in its own time may be lost. Lena proposes that a 'thin' view of history will look at one great person while a 'thick' view will look at the social structures so takes the focus from an individual onto a broader image (pp. 2-3). This could suggest our relationship with the social construct surrounding a genre at a time could affect its place in popular music. Similarly, music which has previously been popular for example 30 years ago but is no longer popular will change genre so there needs to be place for genre fluidity. Frith also (1998) researches how one song or artist may have been in a particular genre at a point, but the same piece of music can be viewed in a different genre in subsequent years (p.77).

The idea of songs overlapping forms and in turn genres is not limited to the ideas of Lena and Patterson. Frith (1998) suggests that consumers of music may also have overlapping tastes (p.77). Many songs are beginning to overlap genres allowing for fans of certain types of music to relate to more than one genre. This is interesting when looking at crossover artists in particular. Artists are often restricted by one genre and the rules of it, however, fans can change tastes and merge tastes freely. Crossover artists can retain some of their



original audience, however, questions can start to be raised about their inclusion in the genre they originate from.

Genre is also viewed by many as a fluid idea (Brackett, 2016; Holt, 2007). Both artists and consumers of music can perhaps move gradually through subgenres without necessarily being fully a part of another genre (Brackett, 2016, p. 4). This is discussed in detail later in this thesis but it is relevant when looking at many country music artists who release tracks that fit in other genres, however, still remain country music artists. In each genre, boundaries are not set, and change based on changing social, political, economic and cultural issues (Lena and Peterson, 2008, p. 699). The genre definition itself can also be viewed as a fluid idea. Lena (2012) suggests that if a genre had a determined boundary that did not change, music would always sound the same which would not appeal to popular music consumers (p. 7). This again makes it difficult to set out a strict boundary for each genre. Artists often want to push the boundaries of the genre they are perceived in, however, often to be commercially successful they usually need to produce music that remains within the boundaries of their genre (Lena, 2012; Lena and Peterson, 2008; Negus, 1999). An artist that is currently successful may not always be successful, although not always, this may be linked to pushing genre boundaries and no longer being accepted by industry gatekeepers. Likewise, an artist who releases a song in one genre may not always remain in the genre, noticed with artists such as Taylor Swift who began her career in country music but became a mainstream popular music artist. To try to limit the risk to music not being commercially successful, Negus (1999) suggests that the creation of strict boundaries by people within the label and music industry will maintain as much control as possible over whether new music is accepted by fans (p. 31). Frith also researches the idea of genre rules. He suggests that once an artist is successful and perceived in a certain genre, they should continue to fit this 'genre mould' in order to be accepted by that genre's fan base (p. 76).

Popular music is audience-led and lets listeners listen to the music they want without trying to push genre boundaries (Frith, 2001, p.96). Lena (2012) proposes a view of genres as 'systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that bind together industry, performers, critics and fans in making them identify as a distinctive sort of music' (p.6). The

idea of boundaries and expectations is what makes each genre unique. Dyer (1981) suggests that ultimately entertainment is for profit and therefore the people who financially back any form of entertainment will decide the style of entertainment that is produced. He suggests that people do not decide what is popular, but entertainment defines what consumers will listen to and therefore the music that will become popular (p.177). This suggests that the producers of music make the choices over what can be popular as people cannot like music that they cannot listen to. If music does not widely exist then it will not be popular, similarly, for music to exist it needs to be marketable to gain funding for production. Music producers know what is popular and therefore will follow the styles of music that are already popular. Looking back at the definitions of popular music, the idea of genre and popular music becomes even more complex. Although fans of the music may be seen to decide the music that is popular, ultimately it is the people releasing the music who decide what is heard. Frith (1998) suggests that radio stations have a large impact on which genre a piece of music is placed in. Radio airtime is essential to an artist's career, so music promoters want their artist's music to be picked up by these stations. A music label will produce music to fit with the music that is currently being played on radio (p.78). Frith (1998) states that often people who listen to certain types of music have certain similarities allowing for a demographic audience to be observed (p.81). This demographic will enable advertisers to target their market allowing for greater commercial gain for the radio station. This will influence the music that each station plays to fit with advertisers.

### The Sound of Country Music

The idea of what country music should sound like is a highly debated topic, combining the sound of the music with different socio-cultural aspects. Bill Malone (2003) states, 'Southern white folk music possessed no single defining ingredient' (p.9). Malone is discussing country music from the 19th century, however, the statement could still be valid today, particularly with the wide variety of country music that is being recorded and released currently. Although the overall sound of country music has varied through time, much of the fundamental aspects of specific instrumentation and style used have remained the same. Authenticity is a key concept that returns often within country music, both within

the sound of country music and within the cultural representation of the people in country music. When looking at the sound of country music, Shuker's (2016) definition of authenticity as a music that is original and creative, with a heavy influence in all areas of production from the person who performs it is relevant to this study (p. 99).

Richard Peterson discusses in depth the idea of certain types of country music deemed 'hard-core', seen as traditional and authentic with lives that parallel their music, and others as 'soft-shell', artists who often sing other people's songs and lead less authentic lifestyles (Peterson, 1997, pp. 150-155). Although this is discussed in-depth later, it is also important to mention when discussing the 'sound' of country music. As the genre of country music is so broad, there are different vocal sounds which can classify a song as belonging in country music. Vander Wel (2017) suggests that historically, hard-core singers within the genre have a nasal twang that can be regularly heard in more historical country music recordings while soft-shell artists had more of a rounded tone associated more with popular music markets. The use of a nasal twang became less noticeable in most country music in later years in order to fit with more commercial markets. Vander Wel (2017) also suggests that by using a nasal twang and use of a regional accent, in particular a Southern American accent, singer's music could be perceived as more authentic (pp. 157-158). Folk singing was also rarely harmonised until post-commercialisation of country music. When country music started to be commercialised, close and precise harmony was added to the folk singing previously heard. In more modern country music, where there is evidence of the influence of general popular music on the genre, harmony has been added in different and broader aspects of country music (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 21). As discussed, when looking at the definition of genre, ultimately commercial success impacts the style of the music produced in the genre. Singing with a nasal twang became perhaps outdated and no longer sold records. This was replaced with more 'soft shell' music.

The musical instruments used in any genre are integral to their identity (Miller, 2017, p. 177). Therefore, the instruments used in country music provide a large part of country music's identity and indeed idea of authenticity within the genre. Bill Malone and Jocelyn Neal (2010) discuss in detail the influences of country music and how the instrumentation that is currently prevalent became part of a country music identity. Malone and Neal (2010)

suggest that American country music was influenced by people from rural areas visiting other areas of America and hearing the styles of music played there, which they could repeat when they returned, slightly altered to fit with the listening tastes of their home area. Due to this, there is a long list of influences of country music, including folk songs, ballads, dances and instrumental pieces from Anglo-Celtic immigrants. Later there are also influences from African American music (pp. 1-9). Generally, the instruments viewed as authentic country music instruments are fiddle, banjo, guitar and a form of percussion (usually the tambourine). The evidence of a focus on fiddle music shows the close link between Anglo-Celtic music traditions and Southern rural music traditions. The piano could also be featured but this was an expensive instrument that was not easily accessible in pre-commercialised country music. After World War 1, when Hawaii became part of America, Hawaiian musicians started being heard in America as Hawaiian people moved to mainland USA. These musicians brought with them the steel guitar which is now widely heard in country music. Another imported instrument to country music was the mandolin from Italy (pp. 19-26). Perhaps one of the most defining instruments of country music, and one of the most universally accepted authentic instruments of country music is the pedal steel guitar. Miller (2017) writes in detail about the complexities of the instrument and the history of the instrument. Importantly, however, he concludes that the pedal steel, unusually, contradicts many of country music's standards. It is simply not an instrument which embodies the 'simplicity' of the genre (p.199). It has become plausibly one of the largest identifying instruments of the genre. The idea of instruments having been imported into the country music identity could show the idea of country music constantly evolving, influenced by music that people hear and want to adapt to fit their own style, viewed previously when adapting different musical styles in the formation of country music.

## Chapter 3: Country Contexts and Histories

### The Culture, Politics and Social Class of the US Southern States

Although the focus of this study is not on the culture or political values in Southern, rural America, it plays an important part when looking at the broader history of American country music, the genre classification of many country songs and it underpins much of the argument surrounding women in country music.

Chris Willman (2005) discusses the complex politics of country music in-depth and the political divide of Nashville, the home of country music. The rural South of America where country music originated, is viewed as Republican and therefore an assumption is often made that country music must also be Republican (Willman, 2005, p.2; Mellard, 2017, p.470). The relationship between politics and country music is not as obvious and clear cut as this may suggest (Mellard, 2017, p.462). Jason Mellard (2017) shows that the politics of country music are not just concerning laws and election campaigns, but the political aspect of country music runs much deeper than this. Politics is a source of identity and can govern the rules of self and society (p.462). Republican or conservative identifying people often have more traditional views on the world. When discussing country music politics, it is important to note that in this study, politics follows Mellard's (2017) idea that looks at how politics forms an identity and lifestyle choices. Many country music lyrics show what is right and wrong to give a picture of an ideal society, often the values and perspectives shown are of white, working-class men (Hubbs, 2014, p. 12).

Country music lyrics often discussed political issues, particularly at the time of the Vietnam War but more recently referring to 9/11 and the Iraq War (Mellard, 2017, p. 473). Although discussed in much more depth later, a key moment to mention, which shone a global spotlight on country music politics was the boycott of the Dixie Chicks. While performing in London in 2003, Natalie Maines stated, 'we're ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas' (Clarke, 2003). This comment, although made prior to the start of the Iraq war, was met with disappointment from many country music fans who began to view the Dixie Chicks as un-American. Patriotism, a populist voice and support for the armed forces is a common narrative in both historic and contemporary country music although partisan

politics, although reflected by some parties' similar values to these areas are largely absent (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 478). Some viewed Maine's comments as against the troops and their impending deployment to Iraq, although this was never stated by Maine. If this was the case, it would contradict the narrative discussed above. Following the statement, there was a sharp decline in the popularity of the Dixie Chicks in America with many people boycotting the group (Mellard, 2017, p. 473). Although the Dixie Chicks received much backlash from their comment, they are not the only country speakers who spoke against Presidents, however, they are alone in the extent of the backlash received following their comments. Hank Williams Junior and Charlie Daniels both spoke against Obama not only during his election campaign but also in his time of office. It could, therefore, be suggested that the blacklisting of the Dixie Chicks was more based on the gender and political party of the commentators rather than the person being commented on (Mellard, 2017, p.474).

Willman (2005) also records the idea of country music holding a certain political identity being a controversial issue, with some suggesting that the people at the top of country music are inherently Republican with a minority of Democrats, while others suggest that there is a relatively even mix of Republicans and Democrats (p.187). However, following the boycotting of the Dixie Chicks, there was a rise of 'Music Row Democrats', an organisation that consisted largely of industry professionals and song-writers (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 479). The rising of the Music Row Democrats is first noticed during the Kerry and Bush election period of 2004 (Mellard, 2017, p. 474). The increase of support for the Music Row Democrats could be partly due to the treatment of the Dixie Chicks, where they received no spoken support from the country music industry, despite the suggestion that there have always been Democrats involved in country music (pp. 187-188). It is important to note the idea that the organisation was mostly industry and song-writers. The idea that artists do not share their political views is again noticed here. Hubbs (2014) writes about the avoidance of discussing political parties or the use of political language but also includes the non-identification to social and political movements such as feminism (Hubbs, 2014, p. 138). An exception to this can be seen during election times where artists sometimes show support of a candidate although this is usually a Republican candidate (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 479). In terms of Presidential backing of country music, Jimmy Carter was one of the first Democratic presidents, during his time in office (1977-1981) to support country music. This

could be seen as the first steps to country music becoming an inter-political music genre (Mellard, 2017, p.471).

Mellard (2017) suggests that the reason country music is still viewed as a particularly conservative genre is due to the making of sub-genres which can politically differentiate artists to a different section of country music rather than mainstream country music, for example, outlaw, alt-country, Americana and progressive country. This could be noticed in the imprisonment narrative of artists such as Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard whose stories were less Republican-leaning and portrayed a wronged innocent (p.473-474). Again, although the lyrics and lifestyle may lean toward a democratic viewpoint, artists did not state their political views. Even posthumously, Cash's estate released a statement following outrage at a Republican tribute for the artist, which still did not show alignment with a particular party (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 479). On the other side of this debate are suggestions that in order to be authentic, artists must show largely conservative-leaning views. Mellard (2017) discusses the questions that have been raised over 'Nashville Ambassadors' such as Brad Paisley performing for democratic presidents raises questions over the artist's authenticity (p. 474). Although country music is becoming more accepted as an inter-political genre, it continues to on the outset be leaning further to the right.

Class is also an issue that can also be discussed in relation to country music. Nadine Hubbs (2014) explores the idea of a working-class Southern America and country music. She looks at the idea of someone describing their music taste as 'anything but country' and some of the reasons behind this. Previous studies of classical music from people such as Bourdieu and Bethany Bryson have linked higher social classes listening to classical music with lower social classes listening to popular music (Hubbs, 2014, p.3). Hubbs (2014) suggests that perhaps due to these previous studies,

Distance from country music can help to define one as a middle-class individual, which is precisely a matter of distinguishing oneself from the tastes, characteristics, and people of the working-class masses (p.3).

Hubbs indicates that country music is both of and for working people. Country music has a clear social identity as a 'Southern, midwestern, Southwestern and provincial; white; Christian; and heterosexual' (Hubbs, 2014, p.3). This identity is perhaps problematic for broader opinions on both the physical area of Southern America and the genre of country music. Country music is the widest circulated discourse on this particular area of America (Hubbs, 2014, p.12). If a particularly underrepresented area of society is not included in the narrative of country music lyrics or industry it could be assumed to not exist which is rarely the case. The idea of storytelling in country music lyrics is ubiquitous throughout the genre with lyrics written for people to understand and relate to. The title lyric of Johnny Cash's 'These Are My People' gave the idea of fitting into a particular type of setting with anyone who does not fit this mould being 'othered' (p.473-475). Statements such as 'these are my people' allow an unusual mix of inclusivity while also being exclusive (Mellard, 2017, p.476). Perhaps this almost states that if a performer becomes accepted, they become part of something bigger, yet the identity of the genre only allows some people to fit with this group of people. While some are accepted despite differences, there is a lack of acceptance or othering of people who are not 'my people'.

### Southern Family Values

As with other areas of country music research, particularly politics, the idea that a certain view is observed throughout every individual fan, performer and industry worker within a genre is not true and can lead to complexities surrounding authenticity. This is also observed in relation to family values of the South, an idea that entangles with political views.

Cahn and Carbone (2010) discuss the differing views observed within a 'red', or republican and 'blue', or democratic, family. This area of country music values focuses more on the values and the way someone governs themselves associated with a political party than partisan politics. As previously mentioned, the South is predominantly viewed as a Republican or red area. The two political parties can be viewed as either traditionalist or modernist. Traditionalism focuses on respect for authority and order while modernism emphasises equality and a more flexible approach. Most people in America will value one



viewpoint over the other yet not many people are strictly one or the other, there is often an overlap (Cahn and Carbonne, 2010, pp. 61-63). Mostly, red families value religious education, a traditionalist viewpoint and can be observed mostly in more rural areas (p.2). Traditionalists value security and put faith in a leader that they believe can provide this. They also, generally, marry younger, however, this has more recently been threatened by new family structures (Cahn and Carbonne, 2010, pp. 71-73). It is important to note that although the Republican party is often connected with religion, it was not until the 1960s-70s that these views aligned. Prior to this, families chose a church due to its geographical location, however, it became increasingly common to travel to a church that aligned with an individual's political views and way of life. In the South during this same time period, 'megachurches' started to arise which were often associated with traditionalist views. The 60s were also a time of change throughout America with some rebellion, particularly against traditional views and values in society (Cahn & Carbonne, 2010, pp. 69-71).

A typical family dynamic in the South has changed throughout time. Prior to industrialisation, families worked locally, often on family farms or in family businesses particularly in Southern states. The industrial revolution meant that in a middle-class family, the man of the household would commute to work rather than work for the family business while his wife stayed at home to look after their family (Cahn and Carbonne, 2010, p. 190). During this time, there were dramatic differences between the role of a working-class woman and the role of a middle-class woman. In the Antebellum South (approximately late 18th century to 1862), there was the idea of women's submission to a husband and keeping a domestic role. The home was viewed as a 'sanctuary', and there was pressure to portray a perfect household, women were responsible for the construction of this (Myers, 2015, p.1102; Stephan, 2008, p. 135). The two aspects of family life, work and home, were viewed as entirely separate spheres. A man was responsible for the money, work and politics while a woman was responsible for children, home and the husband's support (Myers, 2015, p. 1102). Although reforms for women began in urban areas, these were harder to establish in rural areas due to the distance between where people live (Stephan, 2008, p. 135).

The idea of a woman staying at home to create a perfect household was based on a privileged position for most, where a family could survive solely on the husband's income.

This was not the case for working-class women. Following the industrial revolution, there was a demand for working-class women to work in paid labour roles. Women who worked in these roles were still responsible for the household, however, also earned an independent income. Common jobs in this capacity included textile mills where often the larger mills targeted young single women who were paid in cash which they used to pay to stay in company approved housing. There were moral concerns surrounding women working and earning a wage due to fear they would not conform to a family lifestyle. There were, therefore, measures in place to resemble a family lifestyle including the housing mentioned earlier but also curfews, compulsory church attendance and a moral behaviour code (Catton, 2015, pp. 1106-1108). The traditions and family dynamics of the Antebellum South period could perhaps be seen to continue into recent times. An ideal family involved women caring for the children and playing a domestic role while their husband worked and provided for the family (Fox, 2004, p.250). In more recent times, there have been changes to the view of a working-class family, often with women becoming the main financial support for the family (Fox, 2004, p. 28). Historically, the Republican party shows some anxiety around changes in family life which could contradict some of the ideas of women's independence and equality in order to respect family formation and autonomy (Cahn and Carbonne, 2010, p. 61). The relationship between work and family differs for a typical red or blue family (Cahn and Carbone, 2010, p. 191)

Country music is an interesting area of study when it comes to perceptions of family life in the South particularly as many aspects of family life are depicted in the genre. It is again important to note that not all women were conforming to social, political and cultural ideal roles. Although this is the case, there is a general popular assumption that country music culture is defined by patriotism and social conservatism (LaChapelle, 2007, p. 161). Peter LaChapelle (2007) makes observations based on Oklahoma country music musicians, however, many of the ideas suggested relating broadly to country music as a genre and the South. LaChapelle suggests that early records of country music show working-class, liberal people, yet, post-war, there was a move toward a conservative ideology which suggested a suburban family lifestyle (p. 5). LaChapelle discusses in depth the idea of the narrative of country music artists through the perspective of journalism. The 20<sup>th</sup>-century press coverage of country music focused largely on male artists and how women successfully kept the

house for them, maintaining the idea of domestic responsibility falling under a woman's domain (p.159). Lifestyle journalism of the time focused on family, domesticity, consumerism and celebrity news. The magazines could be portrayed to normalise the idea of a suburban stay at home mother who cared for the family with large houses and land which showed their social status and what a country man could achieve if they worked hard enough (LaChapelle, 2007, p.165). It was only middle-class women who could afford to be solely a home keeper and therefore the idea of pursuing employment outside of the household could be discouraged as there was no financial need for a woman to work. Women's homemaking abilities were viewed as the key to their husband's success, this was referred to in many articles that referred to 'the woman behind the man', suggesting also that wives of artists preferred a quiet life away from the spotlight their husband lived in (LaChapelle, 2015, pp. 160-165). This focus suggested that a good wife was crucial to the success of a hardworking man. If a woman was successful domestically, her family life was happier allowing for her husband to be more successful in his work life (LaChapelle, 2007, pp. 163-164). Most journalists from the 1950s and 1960s were male which could perhaps limit women's voices. Although some journalism did focus on aspiring female artists, women were not the journalists meaning they were not voiced. If female artists were included, they were always portrayed conservatively (LaChapelle, 2007, p.163). The narrative surrounding women, particularly the wives of country music artists, focused on a happy lifestyle which could often ignore underlying rumours surrounding the relationship. This was particularly evident when Spade Cooley notoriously murdered his wife, Ella Mae, months after an article portrayed Ella Mae's responsibilities within the household and how a wife did not abandon her duties while being a performer (LaChapelle, 2007, p.164). The magazines arguably became a manual of what a Southern family should look like. Magazines showed how each member of a family should act through the images of what artists were doing in their families. Occasionally, fan magazines would briefly mention equality, however, this would be contradicted in the same magazine with suggestions of the opposite (LaChapelle, 2007, p. 166).

Country music lyrics of the same time also showed the perception of gender roles in society, particularly of the South. It is interesting that although men were portrayed often as hyper-masculine, often 'hard-core' country male country songs showed strong emotions through

their confessional style (LaChapelle, 2007, p. 168). When discussing women in song often the lyrics blamed women for any domestic issues while also discussing men's heavy drinking (LaChapelle, 2007, p. 168). Men were encouraged to drink particularly in honky-tonks while women were blamed for all family issues if they drank. LaChapelle (2007) suggests that a man lost brain cells and sleep when he visited bars while a woman would cause family breakups if she drank to the same extent (p. 168). Many lyrics suggested that if a woman was given too much freedom, she could turn to sexual indiscretion. While men were encouraged to visit honky-tonks, a woman who went alone was not respected (LaChapelle, 2007, p.169). The lyrics of women in the 1960s also added to the perception that female performers embraced the traditional ideal. Tammy Wynette released 'Stand by Your Man' in 1968 which 'sealed feminists view of Wynette as the victim, a doormat for her man' (Keel, 2004, p. 158). Women's identities were mostly tied up in the view of a man. Keel (2004) discusses the idea that many female artists were proud of their suffering and heartache (p.160).

### Country Music in Context

Country music has been viewed as having a traditionally Southern, white, working-class identity that has been influenced by many styles including Celtic, jazz, rock and roll among others (Fox, 2004, p.21; Edwards, 2017, p. 307; Neil, pp. 323-324). Shuker's (2016) definition of authenticity, previously discussed is valid when looking at country music, other factors also determine country music's authenticity. Charles Hughes (2017) suggests that country music authenticity is not only relative to its sonic characteristics but also the cultural factors that are associated with the genre, including the idea of a working-class identity (p.206). The 1990s came with many changes in country music both sonically and culturally. Fox (2004) in his research looks less at the commercialism of country music to focus on the culture of the music and suggests that the idea of a person being 'country' can be viewed as having politically and culturally traditional values (p.28). Fox suggests that the identity of someone viewed as 'country' has conservative views and values of rural people, as discussed above when looking at country music politics. He also suggests that the sociological views are inseparable from music views (Fox, 2004, p. 29), the music is part of the traditional, American, working-class culture. With this, there was a focus on artists

maintaining traditional values, both in their lives and in the perspectives of their songs in order to conform to the genre ideals. The traditional view of working-class culture is styled as a masculine concept with labour intensive jobs being at the heart of working-class culture, in contrast, higher classes of society can be viewed more effeminately (Fox, 2004, p. 250). This could lead to the gender disparity in the genre as the jobs of working-class people are often labour intensive and often fulfilled by men. Men subsequently could become viewed as superior to women as they could provide more for their families. Fox (2004) determines from interviews that women from the South strive for middle-class culture and regularly attend church, perhaps maintaining the conservative family values while white men proudly drink and work hard. This is reflected in the stories told by country music musicians who sing about being hard drinkers, but never drunks (p.251). The idea of men working hard and drinking gives a hypermasculine image, often seen in country music imagery.

Kristine McCusker (2017) proposes that gender conventions and performances in country music have an instability which is hidden under the idea of authenticity within the genre (p.355). Women in these types of Southern working-class families accepted their role in the household and the responsibility that came with it. The authentic Southern lifestyle shows clear gender roles and women who go against this are viewed as inauthentic. This is perhaps best illustrated while looking at artists such as Tammy Wynette as previously mentioned. Keel (2017) looks in particular at 'Stand by Your Man' and states that Wynette led the conservative female movement in country music where traditional views were embraced. In contrast to this at the same time artists such as Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn were questioning the ideologies embraced by Wynette. Keel suggests artists such as Wynette were proud of the suffering they endured (pp.158-160). Wynette also portrayed a working-class culture, a social class that is often associated with country music. This gained her further acceptance within the country music genre (Jenson, 1998, p. 15).

Joli Jenson (1998) argues that within the country music genre, there is a difference between 'downhome' and 'uptown' country music. This idea suggests downhome music is perceived as the working-class, original and authentic country music from the South. Uptown music, in contrast, is wealthy and powerful, moving away from the South into cities and appearing to

abandon tradition and therefore the idea of 'downhome' culture in favour of more modern music. Jenson also argues neither steel guitars and cowboy boots or tuxedos and orchestration can make any form of music more or less inauthentic (p.15). The discussion of what defines 'real' country music arises in much research on the topic. Fox (2004) suggests that,

this phrase refers to live performances usually by professional or semi-professional musicians, of a defined canon of songs in a clearly delimited (though evolving) musical style. (p. 22)

The canon referred to is created through the music that is accepted in the honky-tonk bars of the deep South. The music played in these bars defined the working-class identity that was associated with them. The songs played told stories of working-class people and the jukeboxes and live performances in the bars were limited to the styles that were accepted as 'real' country music (Fox, 2004, pp. 22-23). The idea of adhering to strict boundaries in order to fit in the 'real' country mould is discussed by Peterson, as previously introduced. With few exceptions, hard-core singers were male and sang about drinking and going to honky-tonk bars while soft shell singers were mostly female and sang about love and being a mother (p.150-155). This perhaps further emphasised the difference between female and male singers and enforced a gender binary in the genre. Hard-core music was traditional and embraced the sonic characteristics associated with country music while softshell music often took on a more pop-influenced style. Peterson also discusses the idea that when hard-core music is popular, women do not succeed in the country music industry as the majority of women play 'soft-shell' which does not fit with the old, traditional and rustic sound of 'hard-core' music (Peterson, 1998, p.237).

Holt (2007) discusses that country music has always suffered from stereotyping and this may have been a barrier from being part of a broader popular music genre (p.65). Jenson (1998) too agrees with this and suggests that original country music was mocked in broader America (p.15). This could perhaps be related to the idea of country music as a culture for a working-class society. As discussed earlier, race has been an issue in determining the genre of a piece of music (Holt, 2007). This is also noticed in several areas of country music.

Country music canons can be viewed most obviously in the honky-tonk bars of the deep South. Fox (2004), suggests that the bars he researched in Texas were racially segregated with honky-tonk bars being largely white (p. 24).

Much of the literature suggests that the traditional values associated with country music run much deeper than first appears. Class is an issue when looking at whether music in this sub-genre is authentic or not. The picture of a working-class, Southern family is viewed as authentic and this in turn comes with clear gender roles. Subsequently, these gender roles could be perceived to be extended into country music, perhaps leading to a gender disparity in the genre. Increasingly, contemporary country music is less about men's heavy drinking and domestic values perhaps as country music is increasingly marketed towards both working and middle-class women (Fox, 2004, p.255).

### Country Music and Commerce

Like many other aspects of country music study, commercial success is hard to prove and define. The question arises of what commercialisation is and if it applies to any song that is popular or if there is there an inherent difference in the music that is commercially successful (Jensen, 1998, p. 136). The idea of commercialisation also incorporates some of the anxieties felt when looking at a break from tradition in country music.

Commercialisation in country music has varying views. In one hand it may validate the music, however, when it becomes bigger than the genre it is from, it may lack the sense of tradition that is central to the authenticity argument that is so prevalent in country music (Pecknold, 2007, p.169). Criticism of commercialisation within the genre may come from worries about the move toward a more modern life, something that is not seen in the traditional image of country music, particularly when music was only beginning to be recorded (Jensen, 1998, p. 137).

Diane Pecknold (2007) writes in-depth about the changes in commercialisation within country music as a genre throughout mainly the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Pecknold suggests that the idea of commercialisation is a fairly modern idea which contrasts the image many critics of commercialisation want to uphold of country music having an old and rustic feel. Prior to

the earliest country music on radio, stations were dominated by music originating from Tin Pan Alley with a focus on popular tunes that most people would want to hear on radio (p. 24). The earliest listeners of commercial country music listened to the Grand Ole Opry broadcast which had adverts to target the listeners of the genre, perhaps one of the earliest examples of country music as a successful commercial enterprise (p.14). As with other aspects of the genre, when the Grand Ole Opry became more successful, it began to lose some of the traditional character it had at the start of the show (Malone & Neal, 2010, p205). It would appear that the more successful a commercial endeavour in country music got, the less authentic it became.

The city of Nashville became a national recording hub for all music genres music as country music was propelled into mass media (Pecknold, 2007, p. 170). After the war, country music became popular within many US households but the sound of country music was changing due to the stylistic innovation of the time (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 205). Vinyl rationing during the war meant that music was limited, however, after the war, much more music could be produced and sold (Hughes, 2017, p. 210). People also wanted entertainment following the war and songs with lyrics that talked about the war were popular, dominating country music at the time due to the relatable storytelling style of the music (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 199). At the time of the war, the music was still widely referred to as hillbilly music, however, post-war it began to be referred to as country music to make it accessible to all listeners, not just those living in the South who were already aware of it (Hughes, 2017, p. 211). The narrative of hillbilly music gave derogatory definitions of hillbilly and gave some the image that it was not serious music (Pecknold, 2007, p. 25). It was therefore imperative that the name was changed in order to create a new image of what a country music listener would look like in order for the music to be commercially successful. It is perhaps, in part, due to these negative images of older country music that the residents of Nashville's upper class were apprehensive of Nashville becoming known as Music City. Upper-class residents viewed country music as tacky and thought that the move toward Nashville as its home threatened the reputation of the city. It was argued that the change of country music image was a way to appease these tensions (Pecknold, 2007, p. 182). The commercial viability of country music was beginning to be noticed, particularly as personal



appearance fees across the US were increasing for country music artists meaning they clearly had an audience (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 200).

There were tensions as to whether country music should be heavily commercialised or remain an underappreciated tradition that some were aware of but not available on a larger market (Pecknold, 2007, p. 35). The Country Music Association was founded in 1958 in order to make country music a respectable business and gain community acceptance following the negative image of country music that was previously established (Pecknold, 2007, p. 183). The early years of the CMA were commercially oriented with yearly conventions that resembled business fairs which was far removed from the rustic image that some associate with country music (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. p. 265-266). The addition of the CMA made country music fans worry about being sold out to advertisers, Pecknold (2007) argues that in a sense they were as they were being marketed as a distinct target audience (p.168). The CMA wanted to cement Nashville as Music City and portray it as a good corporate neighbour in order to secure funding for the Country Music Hall of Fame (Pecknold, 2007, p. 187). The Hall of Fame was how the CMA would preserve country music's history (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 266). CMA led many fundraising efforts to be able to open the Hall of Fame. One of these efforts included a 'greatest hits' album, it is interesting that this album included solely tracks that were commercially successful, not the style of music the CMA was trying to preserve in the initial plans for the Hall of Fame (Pecknold, 2007, p. 188). Nashville became a commercial centre as artists wanted to come to record but tourism in the city also increased with the opening of the Hall of Fame and visits to the Grand Ole Opry (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 210). Tourism was a profitable business for the city and the economic contribution it brought to the city led to acceptance among residents (Pecknold, 2007, p.189). It was not just the music that was commercially successful but the lifestyle that went with it and the idea of Nashville as the home of the genre.

As country music became popular with wider markets, some of the music produced began to change to fit with popular music styles. There was an opinion from fans that artists who began incorporating more popular music styles were changing the genre and they worried that the music they knew and liked would not be heard again (Pecknold, p.172). Although traditionalists wanted to maintain the history of country music and the music they viewed

as authentic, more people wanted to listen to the music so it could no longer be kept from mass markets (Pecknold, 2007, p. 170). Fan culture of the time made a clear difference between music that was country and that which was popular music (Pecknold, 2007, p. 170). As country music became more commercialised there were fears that country music was becoming too modern and sounding like pop music.

The 1960s were particularly dominated with this music, which began to be described as the Nashville Sound, arguably a style of music that was not popular with true country music fans which valued music they deemed authentic (Pecknold, 2007, p. 171). The Nashville sound was a big commercial success (Hughes, 2017, p. 214). Perhaps as country music became more commercial, original country music fans felt it no longer represented them as it once did. Music included within Nashville sound was created by recording studios in Nashville that used session musicians who were based in Nashville and became part of the marketability of Nashville as a city, particularly as a recording hub (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 257). Hughes (2017) argues that the idea of the Nashville sound was to increase music business within Nashville, setting it apart from other recording hubs as an artist could produce music in Nashville that they could not elsewhere (p. 213). Country music fans wanted to be responsible for deciding what was country music and the change toward popular music, seen in the Nashville sound style of music was not as accepted by 'true' country music fans (Pecknold, 2007, p.171). There is no doubt that consumerism influenced the change in the style of country music, but it is unclear where the responsibility for this lies (Pecknold, 2007, p.171). The commercial success of the music meant that there was more finance available to produce country music, this could mean that the amount of country music heard could be increased. It could perhaps be argued that the amount of traditional country music heard has not changed but the commercial success means that it is heard less than popular music as that is what sells. Popular music crossovers made country music more palatable for a wider audience, making the music more commercially valid (Hughes, 2017, p. 211). Perhaps the more modern and accessible music was, the more commercially successful it could be.

During the 1970s-1990s, country music continued to grow, becoming more and more commercially valid nationally in the USA (Weisbard, 2017, p. 239). Country-pop had a

greater audience than traditional country music which meant that there was a greater commercial advantage for artists who performed this style of music (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 258). The breakout stars of country music, particularly in the 1990s such as Garth Brooks and Shania Twain were not viewed as country music artists for long. When crossing over to popular music markets, they were no longer included as country music, perhaps suggesting that when an artist becomes too popular, they are no longer country music (Weisbard, 2017, p.241). Country-pop was hugely commercially successful but diluted the traditional identity of country music (Malone & Neal, 2010, p. 245).

### Country Music Crossover

Around the 1970s, country music began to sound more like popular music with fuller orchestrations, more lyrical, smoother singing and more rhythmically challenging music (Peterson, 1978, p. 295).

The term crossover implies that while reaching a broader audience, the product will retain the original audience upon which it attempts to build (Fenster, 1988, p.288)

Fenster's definition of crossover is the definition that is used for the purpose of this study. A crossover artist, although finding success in another genre, will also gain success in the genre they started in. Shuker (2016) explores the idea that because music texts are so closely based on social culture, when an artist finds success, they are under pressure to retain the original audience that they found success with (pp. 60-1). This idea suggests that much of genre identity is formed on commercialism, previously discussed. An artist can only be successful if they have the backing of a label, which they will only get if they are commercially successful. By attempting to create a song that pleases an initial audience and crosses over to another genre, the artist risks losing previous commercial success. Shuker (2016) proposes that often when an artist becomes a crossover artist, they do not retain their original audience, seen particularly with Taylor Swift after the release of *1989*.

In 1974, the Academy of Country Entertainers (ACE) was established by country music artists to determine country music artists from popular music artists after an increase in

artists deemed not country were finding success in the genre (Peterson, 1978, p. 292). During the 1970s, there was a decline in the success of country music due to the rise of rock and roll music and ACE was controversial as people viewed it a ploy for artists to stay relevant during the decline (Peterson, 1978, p. 293). By appealing to the broader popular music market, artists could perhaps bring attention back towards the country music genre. Don Cusic (1998) suggests that there was a changing demographic of listeners from the 1990s and teenagers dominated the buying market (p.202). This could perhaps be linked back to definitions of popular music studies suggesting that music that is popular is that which is purchased by teenagers. Particularly in the 1990s, teenagers formed a large part of the music buying market. In recent years, country music is viewed as one of the most popular genres of music in America (Holt, 2007, p. 63). Country music only became viewed as a major market in America in the 1990s with 'new country' artists such as Reba McEntire, Shania Twain and Garth Brooks. These particular artists became viewed as 'stars'. The lifestyles of the stars mentioned, due to the level of fame and wealth that they gained may be viewed as perhaps a form of escapism for listeners and show an ideal lifestyle. Artists that crossover from country to broader popular music markets show a break from the established traditions discussed in relation to country music by living extravagant lifestyles as opposed to a 'simple' life (Shucker, 2016, pp. 61- 71). An artist may therefore be inauthentic due to the change in societal class and wealth. Don Cusic (1998) suggests that prior to the 1980s, to be viewed as a music 'superstar' an artist had to crossover into broader popular music, however, in modern music culture, an artist can become a superstar while staying firmly rooted in country music (p. 207). This raises questions surrounding what a crossover artist is and if a country crossover artist can remain authentic in country music if they become a 'star' and have greater popularity than is regularly noticed in country music. A move to popular music, particularly from a country music background gives the perception of the artist becoming wealthy and perhaps fitting Jenson's (1998) description of uptown music.

Patsy Cline was viewed as one of the first artists to become a crossover artist from the country music genre. Joli Jenson (1998) suggests that Cline surpassed the stigmas that came with the country music genre. Cline stepped beyond the regular status and class markers that defined country music (p.115). Cline was an 'uptown' country artist, although

previously mentioned that this could mean she was inauthentic in country music terms, she paved the way for other artists to cross into other genres. It is perhaps interesting that one of the first artists to become a country crossover artist was female, considering the lack of female artists that are popular in country music genres generally. It also raises other questions around why artists cross genres, perhaps this could be due to lack of acceptance in a male dominated genre. Firstly, it could be suggested that artists crossover due to the restrictions placed on them by their own genre. Previously mentioned is the idea that artists are bound by these restrictions in order to be commercially successful, however, by becoming a crossover artist, artists can produce music outside of these boundaries. Morally, artists may also not be viewed as country artists when they move into popular music markets. As previously mentioned, country music has very traditional views, views that could be arguably not shared by popular music fans. Of course, this is hard to prove as the audience is much larger, however, should be considered when looking at the idea of artist crossover.

The idea of genre crossover can also be seen in music video. Due to the success in popular music fields, other genres began to make music videos. In country music, this perhaps created a platform for women in country music to portray themselves against the traditional societal norms expected of the genre (Wilson, 2000, p.290). Fenster (1988) looks at how the earliest country music video reinforced the image of country music only showing very specific imagery of small towns and traditional values (p.291). Crossover artists often used music video as a platform to portray themselves as different from the genre they originated from, or alternatively portray imagery which places them in the country music genre while the sound of their music may be better placed in a different genre. This could also be related to Peterson's (1978) idea of softshell and hardcore artists. Perhaps some country artists use music video as a platform to portray themselves as authentic country music artists while sonically 'being' more within the softshell artist category.

## Chapter 4: Case Studies

The case studies below look closely at female artists who have crossed over from either country music into popular music or popular music into country music and include Sheryl Crow, The Chicks, Bebe Rexha and Maren Morris. They look in detail at the various social and cultural issues surrounding the country music genre and determine the response and success of female crossover artists. The artists selected are relatively contemporary, ranging from 1993 to 2018 and show that although many historical issues in Southern America are raised above, the impact of these issues is still prevalent through contemporary country music.

### Sheryl Crow 'All I Wanna Do'

Sheryl Crow is an interesting artist to discuss when looking at genre-blurring, crossover artists. During her career, Crow has released various albums that explore several different genres. The result of this is that many examples of her music display qualities from each of the genres she has been involved with. Similar to Maren Morris, discussed in depth later, Crow takes influences found in other genres and adapts them to fit into country music styles.

Crow has been successful throughout her long career yet remains an under-researched artist. Her chart successes show her diverse genre range and open up questions surrounding authenticity and success. Previously mentioned, Lena and Peterson's (2008) definition of pure pop includes any song that at some point has been listed in *Billboard* Magazine's Hot 100 Singles Chart. By this definition, Crow has had 19 songs in total that could be classed as 'pure pop', many reaching the top 10 in this chart ("Sheryl Crow Billboard", 2020). When discussing Crow as a country artist, she has also had many successes in country charts with 9 songs featuring in the Hot Country Songs chart, 2 albums in Top Country Albums and 11 Songs in the Country Airplay Chart ("Sheryl Crow Billboard", 2020). With Crow's undeniable success in so many varied genres, she is undoubtedly a crossover artist, having an audience that she retains despite later successes.


Many of Crow's songs show the complexities surrounding the idea of genre placement for individual songs. One song to look at in particular detail in regard to this is "All I Wanna Do" (Crow, Gilbert, Bottrell, Cooper & Baerwald, 1993). As previously noted, historically country music was a collection of sounds which were imported to rural areas by people who were travelling and adapted to fit the tastes of the audience in these rural places (Malone & Neal, 2010). As the genre progressed, some instrumentation became part of country music's identity, including simple accompaniments with instruments that were easily transported but particularly a steel guitar (Miller, 2017). The focus in country music is placed on the storytelling lyrics, not full accompaniments. "All I Wanna Do" has many of the key instrumental aspects already discussed that are associated with country music. The accompaniment features a full accompaniment that includes both acoustic and electronic instruments. The remainder of the accompaniment features instruments not associated closer to other popular music genres such as a double bass, guiro, drum kit, guitars and crucially, as almost a hint to Crow's country music background, a steel guitar is featured. The lyrics also feature the familiar story-telling style that is associated with country music, an example shown below.

We are drinking beer at noon on Tuesday  
In the bar that faces the giant car wash  
And the good people of the world  
Are washing their cars on their lunch breaks  
Hosing and scrubbing as best they can  
In skirts and suits (Bottrell, Baerwald, Gilbert, Crow & Cooper, 1993)

The lyrics are based on a poem by Wyn Cooper but are an example of the detailed story-telling nature often heard in country music lyrics. Despite the song is leaning towards popular music sounds, many country music influences are incorporated. This perhaps in an attempt to adapt and change other music influences to gain a wider audience for the artist while also retaining her original audience, as observed in Fenster's (1988) crossover artist definition. The lyrics also hint to the idea of Crow as a genre-blurring artist with the spoken lyrics in the introduction stating,

This ain't no disco,  
And it ain't no country club either  
This is L.A. (Bottrell, Baerwald, Gilbert, Crow & Cooper, 1993)

The song is sonically very different to country music tracks and makes use of with frequent syncopated rhythms. As shown in Example 1, the introduction consists of the below bars repeated several times. The syncopated pedal note, A, is played on electric guitar over the B flat 13 and A13 chords – also relatively complex harmony, given that the track overall is in E major. These syncopated ideas continue throughout the entirety of the song. This chord progression is more complex and more interesting than the I, IV, V progressions often heard. The introduction uses chords IV and a flat fifth chord (A13 and Bb13) before the main body of the song and chorus which follows a I, VI, VII progression (E, C and D).



The image shows a musical score for the introduction of the song "All I Wanna Do". It is written in E major (three sharps) and 4/4 time. The score consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a complex chord structure, including a Bb13 chord, followed by a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff features a prominent, syncopated pedal point on the note A, which is sustained across several measures. The overall texture is dense and syncopated, characteristic of the song's unique sound.

Example 1: Introduction to "All I Wanna Do" (Crow et. al, 1993) featuring a pedal A played on electric guitar (Gilbert et. Al, 1993)

Using Lena and Peterson's (2008) definition, the song is regarded as 'pure pop', peaking at number 2 on the Hot 100 Singles Chart ("Sheryl Crow Billboard", 2020). The song is a clear example of how an artist can fit so many genre rules but still not be fully part of a genre. Despite having many of the features expected of a country song, it does not sound country. It is also noticeably different when played alongside other pop songs of the time due to the wide range of musical influence Crow adapts to include in the song meaning it doesn't quite fit in any genre.



Another important area for discussion surrounding Crow is the idea of being an authentic artist. Shuker (2016) defines music that is original and created by the artist who retains a heavy influence within the production of the music. Crow easily fills this definition of authenticity. As seen in “All I Wanna Do” (Crow, Gilbert, Bottrell, Cooper & Baerwald, 1993), Crow plays a prominent role in writing and recording her songs, although in this case the lyrics have been adapted from a poem, Crow was still involved in the song writing process. The use of the instruments in “All I Wanna Do” could also portray Crow as an authentic country artist. Although the song is clearly not country sounding and leans more toward popular music styles, the feature of a steel guitar could arguably have the piece accepted as an authentic piece of country music. Similarly, the story-telling style of lyrics is deeply rooted in country music’s idea of authenticity. Despite having all the factors of an authentic country song, the song is not country leading to many questions about the strict boundaries that are in place in order for a song to be accepted in a genre. They are simply never going to apply to every song. As previously mentioned, Crow almost mimics the idea of historical country music beginning from people travelling to different areas, listening to music and adapting it to fit a new audiences’ tastes. Crow uses the musical influences from the many different genres she is associated with including rock, pop and country and adapts them to fit in a new style of music that is arguably a fusion of the many different styles Crow has previously incorporated in her music. Other songs by Crow for example “Easy” are sonically much more country music- sounding with heavy guitar presence. Crow is an example of an artist that cannot be defined by an individual genre but manages to find success in several despite most songs that she writes being entirely different in style.

Previously also mentioned is the importance of collaboration as a crossover artist. Noticed much clearer in all three later case studies, but also important to mention when researching Crow. The case study artists have all collaborated with other established artists to launch themselves and grow an audience in a different genre from the genre they started in. Previously having collaborated with Kid Rock in “Picture”, Crow has also used collaboration and extended her own audience through this. Crow takes a prominent role contributing to the writing of the song further cementing the idea of Crow as an authentic artist. Similar to Crow, Kid Rock is a genre-blurring artist but this collaboration song is firmly country music. The music video sets the scene as country music through clear rural imagery. Although the

use of music video in order to depict a song as country is discussed in greater depth below, this video is an interesting comparison when looking at the video for “All I Wanna Do”. The video is filmed mostly in a music studio with some rural landscapes featured throughout. The figure below shows a picture of Hank Williams on the wall while recording. A clear reference to the style of song that is being produced during the recording.



Figure 1: Screenshot taken from “Picture” music video showing Hank Williams in the background of the recording studio (Kid Rock, 2010)

In contrast to this, the music video for “All I Wanna Do” depicts a downtown scene with people floating while listening to Crow performing outside a theatre. Both of these images can be compared to Jenson’s (1998) writing of ‘downhome’ and ‘uptown’ country imagery discussed above. The video with Kid Rock depicts a ‘downhome’ imagery. Country music that is written and performed in rural areas with a focus on the traditional Southern values and a great importance placed on the role of family and a happy household. The “All I Wanna Do” video, in contrast, features a ‘uptown’ style where Crow is dressed in a party style outfit with no reference to her family life and features a more built up area than is often featured in country music video.

Perhaps Crow more than most artists has been placed in a vast collection of different genres, understandably due to the great variation in the music she has produced through the last three decades. Fabbri (2012) proposed that some musicologists deny the importance or necessity of genre (p.8). Although there are many reasons why genre is valid and important. Crow raises interesting questions surrounding this as she does not clearly fit in any one genre. Unlike artists discussed later, Crow establishes her genre-blurring qualities often without the need for collaboration. Crow's song writing style in its own right is often completely opposite in style from one release to the next. Despite this, Crow is still accepted within country music, a genre that is often noted as having strict boundaries in order to be viewed as authentic. Unlike many other crossover artists, Crow does not make a change of style that she stays in for the rest of her career, instead she moves fluidly between genres, retaining a large audience as she does so. She skilfully adapts many influences in order to fit the style she is writing for at the time. Genre is still important in order to categorise music but as mentioned, strict genre rules mean artists such as Crow fall between genres and produce music that could belong in many different genres.

## The Chicks “Not Ready to Make Nice”

Country music artists historically have not discussed individual political views, although it has often been viewed as a conservative-leaning genre as previously mentioned in detail above. Prior to 2003, the idea of a country artist speaking against any President of the United States was unheard of. This changed in 2003 when Natalie Maine’s, lead singer of The Chicks, denounced George W. Bush on stage in London. This was of note, not only for the words spoken against the President and his handling of the Iraq war but particularly as these comments were made in a foreign nation. Due to this event, The Chicks entered a period of country music blacklisting which has been discussed in detail (Malone & Neal, 2010, pp. 475-476; Mellard, 2017, pp. 473-474; Willman, 2005).

Following the 2003 blacklisting, The Chicks did not release any further albums until 2006 with *Taking the Long Way* (2006). Prior to Maine’s comments, The Chicks were the top-selling all-female country group (Watson & Burns, 2010, p. 327). Following the remarks, The Chick’s success dramatically changed with many radio stations refusing to play the music, and the fan base of The Chicks declining (Watson & Burns, 2010, p. 327). Perhaps in order to retain their original country music audience, The Chicks could have returned to styles which follow the nature of country music song writing that is often expected of women in the genre. The Chicks, however, released an unapologetic album, with the track *Not Ready to Make Nice* (2006) facing head-on the issues of oppression they were subjected to following the Shepherd’s Bush comments (Watson & Burns, 2010).

The idea of oppression through the treatment of The Chicks is prevalent throughout their post-2003 careers. Country music has from the outset maintained Republican values in most aspects of society including views on the family, war and the running of the state. The Chicks comments not only showed their views on the President but also their views on war, particularly overseas. The views publicly voiced defy perhaps the core of country music and the traditional values which it stands on. The backlash that ensued was potentially unsurprising. The Chicks were beginning to rewrite country music tradition and use their voice to make clear where they stand in relation to the genre, rather than accepting the

views that came to be accepted with an association with the genre. Interestingly, The Chicks had previously released “Travellin Soldier”, a track which follows the story of a soldier going to the Vietnam War, clearly war was not a topic that The Chicks were scared to approach.

“Not Ready to Make Nice” (2006) suggests that The Chicks were unprepared to change their views to fit with the expected views of the genre. Although never directly addressing the controversy in the lyrics, The Chicks explained in a television interview that they wanted the song to have a universal meaning to people while also being autobiographical of their experiences during the backlash they faced (“Not Ready to Make Nice”, 2006). Rather than apologising for the Shepherd’s Bush incident, where they spoke negatively about the US president at the time, The Chicks used their platform and their newest release to reaffirm their personal political values. The album was the first time that all three members of the group cowrote every one of the songs on the album. Previously, the comments were made by Natalie Maines, the lead singer, by cowriting all of the songs, it makes it clear that the views are that of the whole group, not one member.

The song charted in various categories of *Billboard’s* pop music charts and country music charts. Previously, the majority of The Chick’s success was in country music charts but “Not Ready to Make Nice” was and remains the highest-charting track for The Chicks in *Billboard’s* Pop 100 chart and Hot 100 charts. Although the track also appeared in country charts, the success was not both lower charting and shorter-lived. The backlash could have diminished their success in country music markets but propelled them into broader music markets. The success of the song clearly showing that although their views may differ from the accepted views of both the country music industry and its fanbase, they were still popular in other areas of America. Perhaps it could also be argued that The Chicks views were not as important to other listeners as perhaps they are in country music fanbases due to the traditional history of the genre.

Although the large amount of publicity alone surrounding the backlash has the potential to create a larger and broader audience outside the country music genre for The Chicks, the music they released in 2006 also had an entirely different style to music that they had previously released. Prior to 2003, The Chicks regularly featured techniques and instruments

that form the core history of the country music genre previously discussed including predominantly country instruments such as steel guitar and nasal sounding vocals. “Not Ready to Make Nice” (2006) features styles more noticed in popular music in comparison to this. The instrumentation used includes a full string section with piano, kit and a heavy electric guitar presence. The Chicks keep the close harmonies that they used regularly and maintain the most country-style part of the song which is the story telling nature of the lyrics.

The song follows the idea of country music having simple chord progressions with the importance placed on these story-telling song lyrics. “Not Ready to Make Nice” is mostly in G major, however, during the verses moves more towards the relative minor of E minor. The same four chords are used throughout the track (G, D, Em, C). The verse begins with octave and seventh leaps around G, the relative major, leading to a vocal line that stays in a lower register and pivots around the tonic note, E. The chorus lyrics are reflective and the minor key in this section almost hints towards the years that The Chicks spent blacklisted. The chorus moves to the relative major G major, again there is little movement between notes G, A and B in the melody . As previously mentioned, the story-telling nature of the lyrics in country music is crucial to many ideas of acceptance and authenticity in the genre and the simple chords and melodic lines with a relatively small band for the majority of the track place the focus back on the lyrics of the song and the story that they tell. The Chicks were blacklisted and arguably an attempt was made to not include them in any area of country music. Important questions can therefore be asked surrounding the political issues that decide if a song is included in a genre. In the case of The Chicks, although the song sonically and in song-writing style belongs within country music, many of the gatekeepers of the genre made an attempt to exclude them from the genre. It is therefore not clear the most important factor in deciding a song’s genre and who the final decision rests with. Although definitions above suggest that genre is decided objectively, The Chicks are an example that the decision is more subjective and decided upon by both the industry and fanbase. The Chicks still had success after their return to country music, although sonically similar to other country music tracks, the genre was not prepared to accept the music as country. Although the song had many country music features, it featured more popular music elements than many of their previous releases, particularly the heavy electric guitar

presence and full orchestral section featured in the interlude. It is impossible to tell if the change in the style of songs produced by The Chicks was an attempt to cross over into popular music markets, however, with the backlash that they experienced, it is plausible that they would try to extend the success they previously experienced to other markets into popular music markets and changed their style in order to do this. Further, as mentioned, the album was a success in popular music markets suggesting again The Chicks blurring the boundaries of popular music and country music.

The imagery of the music video also has significance when discussing the role of women and opinions surrounding the use of their platform to discuss political issues. Watson and Burns (2010) discuss the significance of imagery used within the music video. They split the video into three different narratives which tell the story of the comments made against the President and subsequent backlash. Firstly, is the primary narrative, this style is autobiographical and features all three artists wearing black and in front of a black background. The second narrative depicts the incident in Shepherd's Bush, where the comments against the President were made. Here, the artists move freely and stand in front of a white background which eventually gets tainted with a black smoke-like stain. Finally, is the historical narrative, featuring the effects of the comments. This narrative captures several scenes of judgement and punishment an example of which is shown below in Figure 2 (Watson and Burns, 2010, pp. 333-336). The imagery displayed shows yet again that although not directly referenced, it was clear that The Chicks wanted this song to reflect on the previous three years. The imagery could suggest that there is a struggle between what is viewed as good and bad with the sharp contrasts of black and white. The Chicks again showing their lack of apology in the comments previously made. Although Watson and Burns (2010) make important points on this particular song, it is suggested that in the time during 2003-2006, The Chicks had "lost their voice" (p.326). Perhaps it is possible that although The Chicks were not in the spotlight particularly at this time, their voices were not lost. The deep impacts of the incident and subsequent backlash were still being felt with direct references to death threats made during the time referenced within the lyrics of the song. The incident, although happening almost 20 years ago, is still a key point when discussing politics in American country music so although perhaps The Chicks were less

vocal in this time, their voice was undeniably still heard through the media attention surrounding the original comments and the unapologetic response.



Figure 2: Screenshot taken from Not Ready to Make Nice music video (The Chicks, 2009)

Important questions should also be raised surrounding the role of women and their 'place' in society from The Chicks' treatment in the industry. As previously discussed, women's place in a conservative Southern family traditionally meant that a woman was responsible for keeping family life running smoothly. Often women's voices were not heard as this was not their place. Although it would be hard to prove any theory, there is perhaps an argument that due to these views of women in a family setting, there may not have been such a backlash if the artists in question were not female.

Even in more recent years, The Chicks have continued to face controversy in the country music market. In 2016, The Chicks performed in the Country Music Awards ceremony. The invitation to the awards ceremony proves that despite their crossover into popular music markets, they are still perceived to be rooted in country music. The key area of controversy surrounding this performance comes from a crossover from pop into country music with collaboration with Beyoncé. Although not the key point of this study, it is a relevant area to



mention as females and particularly women of colour are rarely seen in country music genres. As previously discussed, it is more uncommon for artists who are successful in popular music markets to crossover into country music markets, even if only for one song. Beyoncé's country style song "Daddy Lessons" was an example of this. Much of the backlash of this particular performance of the song with The Chicks focused around Beyoncé's political standpoint and outspoken nature she speaks of current issues. Francesca Royster (2019) makes interesting points regarding the racial and gender issues surrounding American country music that can be seen in the reaction to this performance and lack of acceptance in the industry. It had and continues to be accepted each year that a popular music artist performs at the Country Music Awards Ceremony with little backlash. Interesting points again could be raised surrounding the backlash when a successful woman of colour is performing as opposed to other collaboration performances from artists such as Justin Timberlake and The Backstreet Boys. The Chicks again remained unapologetic in their approach to their response. In this performance, The Chicks show again how collaboration with artists outside of their genre can be a useful pathway into crossover arenas as discussed in further detail later when looking at Bebe Rexha's collaboration with Florida Georgia Line.

The idea of silencing of women's voices is apparent throughout the treatment of The Chicks. In a genre where it is already much harder for women to succeed than men, the treatment of The Chicks shows that political views are often assumed with consequences for voicing opinions to the contrary. The industry attempted to silence the views of The Chicks, perhaps by not buying their albums or playing their music, it was assumed that they could no longer succeed so would in a sense disappear from country music history. It is perhaps interesting to note that The Chicks were already established artists when the comments were made, having already passed many of the gatekeepers that allow women access to a male-dominated genre. Questions could therefore be raised if an outspoken female artist could ever succeed in the genre if her political views and values did not fit in the genre's 'norm'. The Chicks continue to be outspoken politically and are now joined by many other country music artists who choose to go against the accepted conservative political views that are widely accepted in the genre.

### Bebe Rexha “Meant to Be” (feat. Florida Georgia Line)

Much of the country crossover discussion involves artists who crossover from a country market to a popular music market. It is more unusual for an established popular music artist to cross into country music, perhaps one of the most successful and contemporary examples of this is Bebe Rexha and Florida Georgia Line song “Meant to Be” (Rexha, Garcia et al., 2017). It is important to briefly mention the complexities previously discussed when deciding if a song is ‘authentic enough’ to be a country song. Although not the focus of this research, *Meant to Be* will be classed as a country song for the purpose of this study, due to success in country music charts. “Meant to Be” has been classed by some as ‘genre-defying’ due to the cross-over of collaboration artists, Bebe Rexha, a predominantly popular music artist and Florida Georgia Line, predominantly a country music group (Newman, 2018). Florida Georgia Line have previously also had questions raised regarding their inclusion in the country music genre due to their previous collaborations and sonic influences noted themselves with the release of “Can’t Say I Ain’t Country” (2019), however, again for the purpose of this study are included as country music artists.

The song broke country music records also becoming one of Rexha’s most popular songs she had recorded to the point of release (Moss, 2018). Excluding any country music charts, the song is Rexha’s highest reaching song on *Billboard’s* Hot 100 (number 2), showing the song was a significant success for Rexha. The song reached seven number 1 records across *Billboard* Music charts (Moss, 2018) and was the longest ever running Hot Country song also on *Billboard’s* music charts (Freeman, 2018). Spending 50 weeks at number 1 on the *Billboard* Hot Country chart whilst simultaneously appearing on the Hot 100 charts among others, showed the crossover success of the song. As previously mentioned, Florida Georgia Line are an established country group, while Rexha’s previous recordings have been usually received in popular music markets. Moss (2018) states that the Hot Country Chart is music that is being listened to by people who are not country fans, therefore would give the suggestion that a song that is popular in this chart is a crossover success for a country music artist. With 50 weeks at number 1 in this chart, there is no doubt that the song found wide

success in both popular and country markets. Interestingly, although the song had record-breaking success in the Hot Country Chart, it was not quite as well charting in the country airplay chart. The song remained on the Hot Country Chart for 71 weeks, although peaking at number one on the Country Airplay chart, it was only on this chart for 26 weeks (Billboard, 2020). This data is significant in many ways. The song was undoubtedly a crossover success which can be seen by its prolonged success in the Hot Country chart. The fact the song was less successful in the country airplay chart shows the potential lack of acceptance by country music radio gatekeepers that have been previously mentioned. It is possible to suggest that the song was not accepted by the country music genre as a country music song. It is also important to note that chart success does not necessarily equate to a positive public response from all areas. "Meant to Be" had clearly global success, however, as it was marketed as a country song the response is not always fully positive from this particular market.

A question is often raised regarding the lack of inclusion of women in various *Billboard* Country Music charts. Of course, the data is not subjective and is based on formulas to include sales, streams and airplay, however, these charts are continually male dominated. There are underlying issues around the inclusion of women in country music, particularly apparent is the idea of gatekeepers protecting the identity of the genre which will, in turn, impact the inclusion of women on *Billboard* charts. Women do not appear to often fit in the accepted country music image that is often portrayed and discussed in detail in previous chapters. As previously mentioned, if a female artist's music is not heard on radio or recommended on streaming services, it is unlikely to reach the same potential on *Billboard* charts. As a female artist, Rexha's inclusion in *Billboard's* country charts, particularly with the extent of success in these charts should therefore not be discounted. Rexha was very successful as a female in country music charts, gaining the record for the longest number 1 country airplay with a female lead (Freeman, 2018). Reception of Rexha as a country artist is not widely accepted by both fans and artists and raises more questions surrounding authenticity and the idea of how strongly authenticity is related to the core of country music. Figure 3 shows a tweet from an Americana country artist, Margo Price, distancing Rexha from inclusion in the genre. Although it is positive to see women at the top of such male-dominated charts, it is important to ensure that Rexha is not viewed as a saviour for

women’s representation in country music. With a woman being so successful, Rexha cannot become a token of representation for the genre. Fundamental changes should be happening so women are regularly included in the charts that they are so regularly missing from. There is a possibility that as one woman has been successful, it may appear that there has never been a gender issue in country music. Rexha’s prior success in popular music markets allowed her to have a collaboration with Florida Georgia Line which in turn helped aid her success in country music charts. Female artists who begin their musical journey in country music do not have the same platform as Rexha, it is important that their music is heard and passes gatekeepers for inclusion and, perhaps most key, promotion in the genre.



Figure 3: Artist reaction to Bebe Rexha’s step into country music (Price, 2018)

Florida Georgia Line are no strangers to success on the *Billboard* Hot Country charts, with their 2012 song “Cruise” breaking the same record the collaboration with Rexha would later break again for the longest time at the top of the Hot Country Chart (“Florida Georgia Line | *Billboard*”, 2020). The discussion surrounding bro-country consistently refers to “Cruise” as one of the clearest examples of the genre with hip-hop influences so strong that the song could at times be credited closer to a hip-hop genre than country (Rosen, 2013). Rosen describes bro-country artists as mentioning country life such as pickup trucks and fields, “But what they care about is getting drunk and laid” (Rosen, 2013). Florida Georgia Line also released a remix of “Cruise” featuring Nelly, a notable hip-hop artist. Despite all the clear hip-hop influences and many general questions surrounding their authenticity, Florida Georgia Line are still firmly planted within the country music genre and remain successful when looking at *Billboard* charts. “Meant to Be” finds itself with the similar issues of

authenticity that have often plagued Florida Georgia Line surrounding the sonic qualities of their music. Listening to the track gives a clear indication of country music signifiers, while also showing its popular music influences. The track has many instruments that are mostly assigned to country music including the use of a steel guitar and heavy use of piano in the accompaniment. The lyrics follow country music song-writing styles with a storytelling, country soul feel. Despite this, the song does not sound unfamiliar on popular music radio with a dominant electronic rhythm section. The imagery in the music video also shows a clear push for the song to be included in country music. Rather than pushing for Florida Georgia Line to be included in Rexha's home, popular music genre, this makes it clear that the intention of the song was to be identified as country music.

On a similar note, Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" could also be discussed alongside "Meant to Be". There are perhaps more differences than similarities sonically between the two tracks. Importantly they both feature an artist that recorded a country song that originated from a popular music background. Interestingly, "Old Town Road" has a heavy hip hop influence in style which is arguably found in many bro-country songs, a subgenre that Florida Georgia Line has been associated with since their 2012 song "Cruise" (Rosen, 2013). Crucially, while Rexha's song was so successful in the Hot Country Chart, Lil Nas X was quietly removed from the *Billboard* Hot Country Chart (Leight, 2019). The two songs provide an interesting comparison, particularly as country music often lacks racial diversity, despite country music coming from jazz and blues origins. Although not the focus of this study, an interesting question could be raised regarding how two very similar, popular music sounding songs could be treated so differently by country music charts. A re-release of "Old Town Road" featuring Billy Ray Cyrus allowed Lil Nas X's song to become 'more country', perhaps similarly, Bebe Rexha's inclusion within country music charts may only be due to her inclusion of Florida Georgia Line as the feature artist. Perhaps feature artists can therefore play a prominent part in changing the genre of a piece of music from that of the artist's original genre.

The imagery presented in the music video is perhaps Bebe Rexha and Florida Georgia Line's most unabashed reference to their belonging in a country music genre. The music video is set into 3 clear scenes; Rexha alone and trying to hitchhike; Rexha working in a diner and finally, a dream scene where Rexha dreams of performing with Florida Georgia Line. Figure

4 shows Rexha alone on a rural road. In this scene, Rexha is walking along the road, carrying black bin bags which presumably are meant to depict her belongings after some form of move or breakup. Rexha wears an oversized check shirt, regularly associated with 'country males'. The imagery could perhaps be described as almost damsel in distress in style, before being 'rescued' in Figure 5. In the second part of this scene, Rexha is successful in hitchhiking to be picked up in a red pickup truck, another strong country image. Although we do not see who is driving the first vehicle, later in the same scene, Rexha is picked up in another car where we see the driver. Here, a male wearing a cowboy hat and driving a yellow Ford Mustang. This again could portray an image of Rexha being rescued with her belongings in bin bags by these drivers.



Figure 4: Screenshot from "Meant to Be" showing Rexha in a check shirt on a rural road with an oil truck in the background (Bebe Rexha, 2017)



Figure 5: Screenshot from “Meant to Be” showing Rexha in a red pick-up truck on rural roads (Bebe Rexha, 2017)



Figure 6: Screenshot from “Meant to Be” shows Rexha working in a diner with a Route 66 sign in the background (Bebe Rexha, 2017)

The second scene, shown in Figure 6, shows Rexha working in a diner with a ‘Route 66’ sign in the background. This is shown after depicting Rexha moving into a motel and looking for work, again clear country imagery and showing that Rexha is attempting to start a new life following whatever she was attempting to leave while on the side of the road in the first

scene (which is never made clear to the viewer). The diner role is particularly gender-stereotypical, but this is where we first see Florida Georgia Line, being served their meal by Rexha. At the end of this scene, Rexha is clearly unhappy in the job and while checking the time until the end of her shift, falls asleep on the counter. This leads to the final scene, a dream depiction (Figure 7). In this final scene, Rexha joins Florida Georgia Line on stage at an open mic performance in a country style bar. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the bar is full of men in cowboy hats, drinking beer. The Southern ideal discussed previously in my literature review. As mentioned above, (2013) describes getting drunk as a key aspect of the Bro-Country genre that Florida Georgia Line could perhaps be described as one of the founding fathers of. It is perhaps no surprise that this image of men together in a bar drinking beer is depicted in the final scene.



Figure 7: Screenshot from 'Meant to Be' shows men in a bar drinking beer and listening to Rexha and Florida Georgia Line performing (Bebe Rexha, 2017)

The overall outcome of the track is a song that although some deem inauthentic, could not be packed any fuller of references towards country music. Most importantly are the sonic references to the genre, however, the music video imagery further shows that the track was made to be a country song. It does raise important questions around the impact of authenticity and acceptance in country music and a desire for an artist to be clearly 'country'. Artist perception is key here, there is a clear attempt to portray both Rexha and



Florida Georgia Line as typical Southern people. The impact of this, however, creates some gender stereotypes including those previously mentioned of men drinking beer at a bar while Rexha works in a diner dreaming of performing at the bar where the men are already successfully performing. Rexha needs an invitation to join this 'dream'. Rexha perhaps had an advantage when compared to other female artists trying to break into country music, she already had her own success and was able to join Florida Georgia Line. Perhaps not a perfect example of authenticity, it does still raise questions around if a female artist can ever be deemed fully authentic in country music. Rexha undoubtedly increased her own audience through the release. Although the country music market is smaller in size, she was perhaps performing to an audience that she was yet to tackle. Bro-country artists are not always respectful of women, so it is interesting that Rexha chose to collaborate with such a dominant bro-country group. Although not the focus of this study, a noteworthy question could also be raised surrounding authenticity and race. Regardless of authenticity questions, Rexha was included in all country charts from the start of the track's release. As discussed, Lil Nas X was initially included on country charts and subsequently removed. Both artists found success in other genres, however, crossed over into a country music market. Only Rexha remained in country music charts, despite many similarities between both the artists and their songs. This may be attributed to the fact that Rexha used Florida Georgia Line as her feature artist while Lil Nas X initially released the song with no feature artist. This could highlight the importance of featured artists for subsequent acceptance in a genre.

### Maren Morris "The Middle"

Maren Morris is one of the relatively new artists to become a face of country crossover. Hann (2019) describes Morris as influenced by many genres, which perhaps can be credited for the genre-blurring style that Morris presents. This study will look at Morris as an individual artist with particular reference to "The Middle" but also as part of country supergroup "The Highwomen". Morris is an interesting artist to look at due to not only her collaborative work on both "The Middle" and with "The Highwomen" but the genre-blurring qualities she brings to her own, country music tracks.

Morris' break out popular music song "The Middle" (Johnson, Zaslavski, Aarons, Trewartha & Lomax, 2018), performed with Zedd and Grey was a collaborative performance that was

firmly rooted in pop music markets. Prior to this, Morris, although as mentioned was influenced by other genres, was viewed as a country music artist. From a young age, Morris toured and was influenced by crossover artists (Vincent, 2019). When looking previously at the history of country music, Malone and Neal (2010) suggested that country music was created by the influence of music heard from other areas and adapted to become country music. Although music is no longer performed and shared in this aural sense, Morris is an artist that continues to use influences heard outside her own genre to influence her own music. Malone and Neal (2010) also mention the idea of historically, artists adapting the music they heard elsewhere to fit the taste of an audience they were returning to. By using the influences outside her genre, Morris arguably creates a modern version of historic country music performance.

It is becoming increasingly common for country artists to move more toward mainstream music after establishing a country music career, Morris is no exception to this (Mazurek, 2018). “The Middle” was one of the biggest pop hits of 2018 (Vincent, 2019) and shows the success that can come as a crossover artist for women in country music. “The Middle” is perhaps a world away from the country music roots that Morris usually records, despite other influences in her country tracks. The song is accompanied by purely electronic instruments which are electronically amplified and are far removed from the simplicity of acoustic instruments and simple song style often associated with country music. When previously discussing definitions of popular music, Lena and Peterson (2008) categorised ‘pure pop’ as songs that are in *Billboard’s* Hot 100 Singles Chart, Frith (1998) similarly uses charts to define pop but also adds that the songs are made for teenagers. By either of these definitions, “The Middle” is firmly a popular music song.

Previously discussed is the idea of artists using music video as a platform to categorise themselves as part of a particular genre or often for women to portray themselves as different from expected traditional societal expectations (Wilson, 2000, p.290). Fenster (1988) discusses how some of the earliest country music videos portrayed small towns and rural settings (p.291), which can still be seen in most country music videos today. The Middle’s opening scene is a stark contrast to this, depicting Morris in a busy city, as shown in Figure 8 below. Rather than maintain a country image in the video, Morris shows a total


opposite lifestyle than those previously discussed as authentic and traditional. The video is contemporary with sharp colour contrasts and contemporary dancers. It is far removed from previously acknowledged images of what a country music artist, particularly female, should look like. Joli Jenson (1998) talks in depth about the idea of ‘downhome’ and ‘uptown’ imagery, with ‘downhome’ being authentic, traditional and rural and ‘uptown’ an inauthentic move to the city. This particular video depicts Morris by these definitions as ‘uptown’ and shows a wealthier and city-based lifestyle compared to traditional Southern imagery. This perhaps parallels the idea of crossover artists becoming more successful. There is no doubt that this song was made to be a popular music song with no hint to Morris’ country music past.

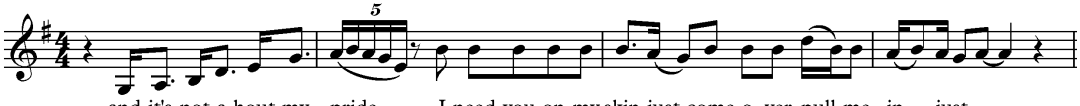


Figure 8: Maren Morris in “The Middle” music video standing in front of a city skyline (Zedd, 2018)

Many comparisons can be drawn between country music and popular music through this track. There is no doubt the track is sonically popular music and leaning towards electronic dance music, and the obvious link to country music is the artist, Maren Morris. Country music often refers to the idea of “three chords and a truth”, referencing the simple accompaniment to the song lyrics. Popular music often follows the same pattern of three chords, this is evident in “The Middle”. The song is in G major and follows a I, IV, V chord progression although the accompaniment is far from simple in style as referenced throughout country music. The accompaniment is dense with a fully electronic

accompaniment featuring keyboards, guitars and kit. Although the chord progression is relatively simple, the amount of accompaniment instruments allows for the chords to become much more complex with added ninths and sevenths. The melody itself has a large range, in the figure shown below jumping almost one and a half octaves from G to D in the space of 2 bars. The lyrics of “The Middle” are also used in an almost word-painting style, shown in the figure below. By jumping from D to G (the tonic) then into B, it leaves the lyrics “The Middle” set up as note iii, in the middle of the previous notes.

|  |
|--|
| <p>Voice</p>  <p>just meet me in the mid-dle</p> |
| <p>Example 2: Chorus statement of “The Middle” (Johnson et. Al, 2018)</p>  |

|   |
|---|
| <p>Voice</p>  <p>and it's not a bout my pride. - I need you on my skin just come o-ver, pull me in - just -</p> |
| <p>Example 3: Pre-chorus vocal range featured in “The Middle” (Johnson et. Al, 2018)</p>  |

Interestingly, Morris works on this track as a collaboration with other established solo artists, Zedd and Grey. It is a recurring theme that often when becoming a crossover artist, a solo artist will collaborate with a pre-established artist in the genre. “The Middle” is a good example of this, but it can also be seen with artists such as Bebe Rexha, discussed in detail previously. Shuker (2016) suggests that music is authentic when the performer has a heavy influence on the creative process (p.99). As a country artist, Morris is not a stranger to authenticity debates in the genre but interestingly, Morris did not have any creative input to the writing of “The Middle” (Johnson, Zaslavski et al., 2018). By this argument, Morris is not an authentic artist in this genre. When performing as a country music artist, Morris has been both a writer and produced in every track of her own albums. Despite the debates around Morris’ authenticity, by Shuker’s (2016) definition above, she is therefore an authentic artist. Morris was not involved any part of writing or producing “The Middle”,

perhaps a signal that although this collaboration was outside of her genre, she is not an artist that is part of this genre of electronic dance music style popular music.

Despite the success of “The Middle”, Morris fits closely with Fenster’s (1988) definition of a crossover artist by retaining a majority of her original audience, despite the success of this particular track (p.288). Following the release of “The Middle”, Morris again worked collaboratively with country supergroup The Highwomen. The Highwomen was an all-female answer to outlaw country group The Highwaymen featuring Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson. Although part of the group, in contrast to her own music again in this collaboration Morris was not involved in the song writing or production of any Highwomen tracks. The music produced by The Highwomen is instrumentally very fitting in a country music genre and is conceivably some of the most ‘country sounding’ work that Morris has released. Unlike Morris’ previous collaboration in the release of “The Middle”, there is an idea of simplicity in the instrumentation, featuring acoustic guitars, string presence and steel guitars. The lyrics follow country music’s authentic, storytelling style (Malone & Neal, 2010). Interestingly, particularly for an all-female group, the lyrics are often political and show a clear political standpoint. Although perhaps controversial, The Highwomen rewrote a song performed by The Highwaymen, “The Highwayman”. “The Highwayman” lyrics depict hypermasculine roles and tell stories of at times far-fetched experiences, including being a star ship pilot.

Brandi Carlile, a member of The Highwomen commented in an interview,

We rewrote it with fates that befell women: a doctor convicted of witchcraft; an immigrant who died trying to get over the border but got the kids over safe and sound; a preacher; and a freedom rider who gets shot. (Hudak, 2019)

The lyrics could be telling the story of many real women and the persecution many women have faced through time.

I was a freedom rider  
When we thought the South had won

Virginia in the spring of '61  
I sat down on the Greyhound that was bound for Mississippi  
My mother asked me if that ride was worth my life  
And when the shots rang out I never heard the sound  
But I am still around (Webb, Shires & Carlile, 2019)

The lyrics are almost graphic and show the reality of women who have stood up for a cause. Weiner (2019) describes the group as 'a mission as much as a band' with a clear mission, 'solidarity with other women in country music'. Mentioned previously on numerous occasions is the gender disparity in country music as a genre, much of the lyrics within not only this song but the album released by The Highwomen show the gender disparity in society. Outlaw country, as pioneered by the solo artists featured in The Highwaymen, was able to go against the expectations of Nashville's country music industry (Weiner, 2019). By becoming an almost branch of this initial country music supergroup, The Highwomen make an attempt to also push the boundaries of the genre for greater inclusivity. Again, in an interview, Carlile commented, "It's really important that the lack of representation for women in music doesn't come across as some bougie, elitist problem. It's regular people and regular little girls in small towns that don't get access to their story being told" (Weiner, 2019). As previously mentioned, there is a lack of women in country music, however, it is unclear at what part of an artist's career this disparity becomes apparent. The idea that Carlile suggests of underrepresentation could be presented within country music as a genre. If female artists are not featured as a regular part of a genre then perhaps it is accepted that they do not exist or are not important. This could continue to decrease the number of women who are successful in the genre.

Morris can perhaps be described as a country music anomaly. The Highwomen, of which Morris plays an integral part, discusses political issues including immigration, sexism and racism which may not appeal to a lot of country music's largely conservative listeners (Weiner, 2019). Morris herself has been outspoken against firearms, particularly following the Las Vegas mass shooting, releasing *Dear Hate* to raise money for the victims (Vincent, 2019). Morris stated in an interview, "I know that when I speak out, I lose fans, but I'm starting to care less about that" (Vincent, 2019). As a female artist, often being politically

outspoken can lead to a lack of success in country music or blacklisting as seen in the case of The Chicks. Crossing over into other genres often also limits an artist's original country audience. Despite all of these factors, Morris remains a successful inter-genre artist. Although many of Morris' songs are genre-blurring and influenced by other styles, "The Middle" was her first song that had no relation to her country music roots. Again, a crossover by collaboration, it is clear that much of Morris' subsequent success came from the release of "The Middle", despite keeping her original audience. Morris expertly uses collaboration in both senses to create a broader platform for herself as an artist but also raise important issues surround country music particularly seen with The Highwomen.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The case studies presented above begin to answer some of the questions raised in the introduction surround female crossover country artists, specifically in American country music. The varied examples of the range of crossover artists that are in some way related to country music show the impact of the social, political and cultural issues raised in the literature review. Despite the decision to choose relatively recent examples of female artists, it is clear that there is still gender disparity within the genre. Further, the case studies have shown that women in the genre are held to a particular standard in society which can often attempt to limit their voice.

The idea of audience perception of an artist can have an impact on both the genre identification and success of an artist. The perception of The Chicks changed during their blacklisting from country music, losing many country music fans but gaining fans in wider fields. Following this, much of their music is viewed as “country-pop” crossover work. The idea of artist perception is also viewed when looking at the negative genre reaction of Bebe Rexha, particularly from some country music artists. Rexha was not deemed authentic and therefore not widely accepted in country music, a genre that prides itself on its authenticity. Morris and Crow are perhaps the most similar case studies. Both of these artists’ individual work can be identified as genre-blurring featuring many influences from other genres. The case studies have proven that often genre is not clear cut, despite many definitions and research into this area, an artist can be influenced by the features of various genres. Both of these artists have found success outside country music, however, due to the genre-blurring style of their music, at times are deemed inauthentic. It raises the question of whether artists intentionally become crossover artists or whether there is a natural progression of their creativity that is influenced by other genres. Country music itself is a genre created by adapting other music influences to best fit their audience. It could be suggested that an artist who is perceived to be inauthentic is not fully accepted in country music. Although many definitions of authenticity lead to both Morris and Crow fitting the role of an authentic musician, this does not always correlate as an authentic country musician. Crossover artists as a whole are not always perceived as authentic and therefore may not fully belong in country music. Although not mentioned throughout this work, an interesting



crossover artist as an example of this is Taylor Swift, discussed in depth by Travis Stimeling (2016).

Many of the definitions used previously in this thesis in relation to popular music and genre rely on chart data in order to decide whether something belongs in a particular musical field (Lena & Peterson, 2008; Frith, 1998). It is clear from the case studies used that chart data does not give a full picture on a recording's genre. Country music in particular has societal standards of an artist that can decide if they are included or not. The Chicks country music blacklisting is researched in detail but shows the extent to which the music industry has an impact on an artist's inclusion and success in a particular field. *Billboard's* Hot Country charts are particularly interesting in this argument. There was arguably a form of bias when Lil Nas X was removed from the Hot Country chart, while Rexha broke records in the same chart, despite also not being an artist that started off in country music. This is also comparable to the treatment of Beyoncé at the CMA awards when performing with The Chicks, referenced above, despite many white pop artists performing with little negative feedback. In both of these examples, race is a key factor to consider. When looking at country music as a whole, there are very few artists who are not white. Sheryl Crow also has songs that feature on *Billboard's* Hot Country chart that by many definitions are more leaning towards pop music than country. Crow still navigates a successful and accepted career within country music scenes, despite moving in and out of country music throughout the past three decades. The overall image of success is difficult to measure in all music fields. Different results may also occur when looking at aspects other than chart success for example commercial success, touring tickets sold, promotional success and many other areas. Although charts are perhaps a way of classifying a song, other areas of success can be taken into account when looking at crossover artists. When they find success in wider markets, they become more 'uptown' (Jenson, 1998), perhaps beginning a movement out of authentic country music and leading to a new perception of the artist.

The case studies discussed also raise questions about the barriers faced by women in American country music. Women are underrepresented in all areas of music and country music is no exception to this. It is perhaps interesting that so many women in country music find much larger success as crossover artists. As mentioned, Taylor Swift was not a case

study in this project, however, is an interesting example of a female artist to find much greater success outside of country music's often limiting, strict boundaries. It is also apparent from my literature review that often, women in rural, conservative areas of America face expectations to keep a traditional family image. This can mean that outspoken women may have decreased acceptance from the largely conservative fan base in rural, Southern America. The case studies prove that artists are aware of the risk they take in being outspoken, shown particularly by Maren Morris and The Chicks. The traditional values that are ingrained in country music history, referenced above, can also be seen to play a part in artist perception, particularly women. Historically, women were in charge of the family and not permitted a voice. As crossover artists, the women mentioned in the case studies grow a much larger audience, in the case of all but Rexha, distancing themselves from the rural country routes that are such a large part of the genre's history. Again, this may be a reason why often female country artists begin to be perceived as inauthentic within country music fields. The idea of outspoken women is also perceived as a negative, "shut up and sing" becoming one of the terms that was used in the boycott of The Chicks.

The location of recording for music and potentially collaborations or connections within an industry has been discussed and can perhaps place similar sounding songs in entirely different genres. Further research could be undertaken to look at artist collaborations and the impact on success of all artists featured in collaboration. The case studies above have all at one point been part of a collaboration outside their own genre. Although this is increasingly common, it raises further questions around collaboration and why such success is often found in breakout collaboration tracks such as "The Middle".

Much further research could be completed looking at crossover artists. This research focused on women, however, it could be interesting to compare the differences between female artists who become crossover artists and their male equivalents. Tokenism is also an interesting area that could form part of future research. Although not discussed in-depth, it is mentioned when dealing with Bebe Rexha's success. It is often perceived that when one woman is successful in country music that there is no longer an issue with gender disparity. Similarly, there is a lack of racial representation in the genre, however, a minority of people of colour being successful does not change the lack of both gender and racial diversity in the

genre. At first glance, it would appear that the country music industry is trying to increase its' diversity with the CMA awards recent theme of "honouring women" and Mickey Guyton becoming the first Black country artist to ever perform at the American Country Music Awards. Although there is progress being made, it is important that these are not token offerings and are part of further inclusion in the genre.

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