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Women's Hit Cheating Songs: Country Music and Feminist Change in American Society, 1962-2015

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WOMEN'S HIT CHEATING SONGS: COUNTRY MUSIC AND FEMINIST
CHANGE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY, 1962-2015

A Thesis

Presented to
the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Madeline Rachel Morrow

June 2017

Advisor: John J. Sheinbaum

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines songs about cheating performed by women in country music that appeared on year-end country songs charts in *Billboard* magazine from 1962 through 2015. The study of a total of fifty qualifying songs included a focus on their lyrical and musical content, the performers' personae and careers, and the way the particular outside factors of feminism and changing gender relations in American society may have influenced them. These songs do not show a purely linear progression of or emphasis on social change, in spite of country music's pride in conveying the truth about the lives of its songwriters, performers, and audience members. Rather, country's hit cheating songs by women indicate that unique factors including and in addition to feminism and social change influence each song individually.

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We used to get a little respect
Now we're lucky if we even get
To climb up in your truck
Keep our mouth shut and ride along
Down some old dirt road
We don't even wanna be on

--Maddie Marlow, Taylor Dye, and Aaron Scherz,
"Girl in a Country Song," 2014.

They say it's a man's world
And it's not that I'm not good enough
But nobody wants to hear
Little songs from a girl

--Ruthie Collins, Natalie Stovall, and Jessica Roadcap,
"Dear Dolly," 2016.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a country song in which the singer portrays a woman who is in love with a married man. He is her only partner, but she must share him with his wife if she wants to continue her relationship with him. While she does want this, it gets exhausting: the constant goodbyes, wondering when they will have the chance to be together again, having the same conversation about changing the status quo repeatedly while nothing ever comes of it. He promises her he will leave his wife, but that day never comes. At what point does her exhaustion with the circumstances of their relationship win out over her love for him? When does she decide to take better care of herself, her heart, her soul? And then: does she have the courage to end it?

A reader who is not well-acquainted with contemporary country music might think such a song as described above could never exist. Yet those who are familiar with the genre since the start of the new millennium are more likely not only to imagine such a song, but also to name it and the performers who made it famous. They may even know the songwriter's name, and probably started singing it at some point while reading the previous paragraph. The song described above is Sugarland's "Stay," released in September 2007, the last single off their album *Enjoy the Ride*.¹

¹ Note that mentions of all songs from here will include at least the performing artist(s)'s name and the title of the song, with the year it was first released only when a song is newly addressed in a new section. For full bibliographic information on all musical recordings referenced in this thesis, see the Discography on page 132.

“Stay” plays on the classic country music trope of infidelity in romantic relationships, but it approaches the topic in a wholly new way that has yet to be replicated. It was a big enough radio hit to appear on *Billboard*’s year-end country songs chart in 2008.² Add to that its iconic music video and its continuous presence on radio playlists since its release, and “Stay” is the defining moment of Jennifer Nettles’ career. As the song’s composer and Sugarland’s lead singer, Nettles garnered most of the attention generated by “Stay.” As a solo artist, she made it her signature song, and she has released at least two others that share certain similarities with it since the duo went on hiatus a few years ago.

In its treatment of the end of a romantic relationship, “Stay” is explosively progressive for country music while simultaneously conveying a sense of authenticity, and of deeply personal emotion and experience that country music fans expect and demand from their favorite performers. “Stay” is so genuinely *raw*, so full of ostensibly real anguish that Nettles and her performing partner, Kristian Bush, had to work hard to establish publicly that Nettles had not written from personal experience and that the song was not about the two of them, lest it tarnish their reputations and damage their personal relationships.³ Once the rumors were quashed, the emotional strength of the narrator’s experience overrode the potentially problematic combination of a country song about a woman who finds inner strength, independence from a man, and ultimately liberation. “Stay” is simultaneously truly feminist *and* truly country.

² These charts are referenced throughout this study as the source material from which I created the body of songs examined.

³ Lindsey Roznovsky, “The Story Behind Sugarland’s ‘Stay’: Jennifer Nettles Inspired by Reba McEntire’s ‘Whoever’s in New England’,” CMT.com, December 28, 2007, <http://www.cmt.com/news/1578707/the-story-behind-sugarlands-stay/> (accessed January 17, 2017).

Nettles' first recorded track as a solo songwriter, "Stay" is an excellent representation of the approach this study takes to country music. It illustrates the seemingly paradoxical dichotomy of, or the dialectic relationship between, country music and feminism in the United States. Many people, both fans and observers, see country music as a socially conservative genre and industry. They might have a hard time believing that feminism is present in country music at all, and there is plenty of evidence to support the idea that country music is inherently anti-feminist. But when hit songs from several decades are examined together, it becomes apparent that feminism has been an influence on country music throughout the last half-century and longer. There is plenty of give-and-take; as time goes on, feminist approaches to the cheating trope increase, but there is always someone who takes a more "traditional" view in her song.

Many external factors influence American country music, and late twentieth-century feminism is among them. To paraphrase Theodor Adorno, music loses its meaning when it tries to exist in a vacuum, or when scholars attempt to examine it outside of its context.⁴ Yet country music and feminism form a dichotomy, an opposition; there is an ongoing dialectical relationship between them. The idea of feminism in country music may sound contradictory in light of the genre's reputation for promoting social conservatism, but viewing the genre through the lens of feminism and changing gender roles in American society assists in furthering the understanding of country music and its history.

⁴ "The work of art has only art as its object. It cannot aesthetically escape the context of deception to which it socially belongs. The radically alienated and absolute work of art, in its blindness, relates tautologically only to itself. Its symbolic nucleus is the realm of art. And thus this work of art becomes hollow." Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Continuum, 2003), 46.

As with any form of music or art, it is impossible to take into consideration every individual part of a country song's context, but this thesis will outline several of those influences while focusing on feminism, feminist changes in society, and changing gender roles and relationships both in the music itself and in the country music industry.⁵ As Karen Saucier Lundy writes, "the roles that women and men play have experienced great change in recent years, and research of all forms of media indicates that these changes have been reflected very slowly in the mass media."⁶ In the case of country music, being a part of the mass media is not the only factor preventing the genre from accurately reflecting the changes in gender roles over the past several decades. Country music as a genre is associated with a socially conservative production industry and audience,⁷ as well as with an adherence to and emulation of the traditions and history of the genre itself. One author who supports this assertion is Jennifer Lawler, who says in her book, *Songs of Life: The Meaning of Country Music*, that while it is "often considered conservative, country music manages to reach out and appeal to countless listeners of all shapes, sizes, ages and political creeds."⁸

⁵ I am purposely approaching this study with a primary focus on feminism and gender relations due to the enormity of other social issues in country music and its surrounding culture. Articles and studies addressing other social issues in the genre abound, covering everything from the conscious whitewashing of country's history to country musicians' displays of their political affiliations and beyond. While such issues do concern and interest me, including in this study all of the problematic aspects of country music culture where they overlap with women's changing roles would be quite time-consuming.

⁶ Karen Saucier Lundy, "Women and Country Music," in *America's Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society*, ed. Kenneth J. Bindas (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 213.

⁷ This is a somewhat erroneous association, as many performers and members of the industry are socially progressive and politically liberal; the audience is similarly divided across many ideologies. Jennifer Lawler, *Songs of Life: The Meaning of Country Music* (St. Paul, MN: Pogo Press, 1996), 2; Bill C. Malone, "Country Music," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1980), 4:584.

⁸ It is worth noting that, even in 1996, Lawler does not mention several other identifying factors in the country audience; her most glaring omission is race. Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 7.

Although the country music industry prefers to present itself as a pure, unchanging, and self-referential musical genre, no form of art can remain unchanged in a changing world for long. Therefore, in spite of its apparently slow to nonexistent reactions to progress in the society in which it functions, country music has indeed changed over time. In other words, some aspects of the genre remain static, but the music and the industry are fluid. Aspects of the genre such as musical style and instrumentation, song form and metrical standards, social norms as reflected in the lyrics and in the performers' lives, and the heavy emphasis on lyrics in country songs are viewed by many as rigid and unchanging. Yet the standards in these areas that are in place today were established over many decades, and are commonly used in contemporary country music as a starting point from which to deviate for musical interest. Country music's history, both distant and recent, both social and musical, is complex, but it contains notable progress throughout, especially because its pride in lyrical realism makes it, as Lawler phrases it, "an intelligent, ever-changing commentary on important social issues."⁹

A Brief Discussion of Country Music and Its Culture

In a concise description that serves as a good introduction to the genre, country music scholar Jocelyn R. Neal proffers that "one of the hallmarks" of country music is acknowledgement of and adherence to long-standing traditions in the music, its performance, and the lifestyles of the performers, which contributes to a less linear and more cyclical history of the genre.¹⁰ She adds that

⁹ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 4.

¹⁰ Jocelyn R. Neal, "Top Ten Country Music Stars," *Southern Cultures* 15 (Fall 2009): 71.

new generations of singers pay tribute to their predecessors by building on their legacies and adhering to the strongest claims of lineage. Stars cover the songs of their own heroes, borrow and build on their styles, and openly educate their fans about the musical traditions to which they lay claim. As a result, the careers and influences of the greats within country music are hopelessly entangled.¹¹

Further, many forces and people influence the creation of country songs, including songwriters, performers, producers and record companies, social norms both inside and outside of the country music industry, and the expectations of the industry and its fans. Therefore, although a group of songs may all discuss the same general topic, they will be markedly different from one another. They change depending on timeframe and depending on the performers, meaning that some songs are separated from each other chronologically but are similar in approach, while other songs are close chronologically but vary greatly in approach.

Country music's distinctive reputation with regards to the demographics and sociopolitical views it represents also affects its creation and performance.¹² Many people see the musicians, industry, and audience associated with the genre as traditionally more conservative than the rest of society, at least partly due to a perceived lyrical emphasis on morality, simplicity, Christian faith and values, rural life, patriotism, and romantic relationships. Some scholars, such as Lundy, even go so far as to call it "the most conservative and traditional of American music."¹³ The emphasis on a supposedly ideal, rural way of life influences the conventional moral code for the country music culture as much as Christian teachings do. One possible description of a perfectly upright citizen in

¹¹ Neal, "Top Ten Country Music Stars," 71.

¹² Malone, "Country Music," 4:854-855.

¹³ Lundy, "Women and Country Music," 213.

country music is someone who lives a simple life in which he works the land by farming or ranching, loves his wife faithfully, attends church regularly, and takes great pride in being an American.¹⁴ However, these traditional views of the social norms and moral code of the genre are constantly being challenged, especially in the time period covered by this study. Women tend to challenge social norms in country music simply by participating in it. This particular form of challenge is seen by some women as an invitation for further toying with country traditions, while others interpret it to mean that the rest of their personae should be as traditional as possible.¹⁵

However, the country industry also prefers to believe that the genre represents real life, and so the supposedly favorite topics for lyrics do not always apply in ideally traditional or conventional ways. Romantic relationships feature prominently in country music, much as in other genres, and such relationships are messy. Therefore, if country music offers its audience the truth about life, its portrayals of romantic relationships and love ought to be messy. As a result, over time, sex is more pervasive in men's and women's love songs, cheating is no longer exclusively presented as the height of immorality, and women in romantic relationships are more complex beings than in the past.

When it comes to the music itself, certain characteristics traditionally denote a song as belonging to the country genre, although these are more likely to be altered by

¹⁴ The use of the pronoun "he" is deliberate. Tricia Jenkins, "Country Music Tradition and Thomas Jefferson's Agricultural Ideal," *Popular Music and Society* 29 (February 2006): 37-50.

¹⁵ Examples include Martina McBride's "Independence Day" (1994) and Mickey Guyton's "Better Than You Left Me" (2015), respectively. Guyton in particular is noteworthy as the first black woman to receive the level of recognition she has, but her music is fairly safe. It breaks no boundaries beyond what women did in the 1990s, unlike McBride's powerful step towards bringing domestic abuse into the public arena in 1994. In fact, Guyton's sound and lyrics are very much like what was on country radio as she grew up.

songwriters for emphasis and interest as the timeline for this study approaches the present. Alena Horn's description of the sound of country music includes that "instrumentation like the fiddle and the steel guitar and a square, danceable metrical structure help to distinguish country music from the pop music genre."¹⁶ Horn's reference to the metrical structure in country means that songs are frequently in a simple 4/4 meter, and that musical phrases generally fit into a multiple of four bars. An additional feature of traditional phrasing in country music is that songs include up to a measure at the end of a phrase where the vocalist is silent while the accompanying instrumentalists denote the transition into the new phrase or song section.

In country music today, sounds thought of as traditional include factors such as instruments like acoustic and steel guitars, fiddle, double bass, piano as a nod to honky-tonk environments, the early African-American influence of the banjo, and backup singers in close harmony such as those who provided part of the pop influence on the Nashville Sound.¹⁷ Electric guitar and bass, elaborate drumsets, and orchestral string sections are more common in recent country or in country influenced by pop and rock. Additionally, most country performers possess a distinct accent that sounds obviously rural and/or Southern, spoken word sections are not particularly unusual, and the lyrics contain easily interpreted and relatable subject matter.

¹⁶ Alena Horn, "'Keepin' It Country': What Makes the Lyrics of Gretchen Wilson Hard?" *Popular Music and Society* 32 (October 2009): 462-463.

¹⁷ **Piano:** Stephanie Vander Wel, "I am a Honky-tonk Girl': Country Music, Gender, and Migration" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2008), 244-245; B. Lee Cooper, "Honky Tonks, Jukeboxes, and Wild, Wild Women: Audio Images of Blue-Collar Night Life—A Selected Discography," *Popular Music and Society* 31, no. 5 (December 2008): 663. **Banjo:** George H. Lewis, "Lap Dancer or Hillbilly Deluxe? The Cultural Constructions of Modern Country Music," *Journal of Popular Culture* 31 (Winter 1997): 164. **Nashville Sound:** Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 18-19.

When it comes to country singers, vocal and melodic acrobatics are conventionally less prominent than in other genres due to several factors, including clarity of lyrical expression and authenticity of sound as it is tied to country music traditions. One of the primary concerns for country vocalists is that their audiences can easily decipher their words, so it is less likely that they will perform difficult or complex melodies. While this means that sometimes a country singer's persona includes an unrefined voice, it does not exclude powerful and beautiful voices from success in the country music industry. In fact, women performers arguably need notable vocal qualities more than men do if they wish to succeed as country singers, at least partly because it is harder for women to break into the industry throughout its history.¹⁸ Additionally, melodic simplicity and certain timbral qualities—one often hears the phrase “high and clear” used to describe this kind of voice—are associated with “authentic” country music for many people.¹⁹ A performer who can at least sing in tune and with emotion evokes images of pre-commercialized country music and the supposedly simpler lifestyle from whence it came.²⁰ If the performer possesses a powerful, beautiful, or otherwise remarkable voice, it is a nice addition to his or her stage persona, but not a necessary one.

¹⁸ “Notable qualities” does not necessarily mean a powerful or beautiful voice. Rather, it is important that female singers have *distinct* voices in addition to other remarkable parts of their performing personae, whereas many male singers can rely on other factors in their music to distinguish themselves.

¹⁹ A long-running debate among the genre's proponents and performers surrounds what qualifies as “authentic” in country music. In this debate, perception matters more than biographical or historical facts.

²⁰ Commercialization of what would come to be known as country music began in the early 1920s and occurred through radio airplay and gramophone recordings. Although it was not the very first such recording, the first country music hit recording was made in 1923 by Fiddlin' John Carson. For the purposes of this study, Carson's recording marks the beginning of commercialized country music history. Malone, “Country Music,” 4:854.

Although a general pattern of fluctuation between the heavy use and popularity of “traditional” and “pop” sounds weaves through the genre’s entire history, these sounds and others actually all coexist within the genre at any given moment.²¹ Even the same artist often uses different and diverse sounds from one track to the next. In fact, as Jennifer Lawler asserts, “It is the tension between tradition and change that is the creative force behind this brand of music, constantly pushing and pulling it in different directions.”²² This perception of country music supports the dialectical view of it that is most important to this study. On the other hand, each country song is unique unto itself, as individual as the people who created it, in spite of, as Neal puts it, “country songwriters hav[ing] used similar . . . devices in different songs to present the same types of narratives”²³ and in spite of the country music industry relying heavily on its own traditions. Therefore, generalizing about the genre’s musical sound(s) can be problematic.

However, one aspect of the music does lend itself to a form of generalization: Horn, among others, asserts that “lyrics . . . help to define the country song.”²⁴ This means that, unlike in other genres such as rock, the lyrics must be clearly audible over the instrumentation. In other words, country audiences expect a musical simplicity that both allows for and supports the importance of a song’s lyrics. This is an area of country music tradition that is rarely ignored, even when artists choose to utilize instrumentation or meter in unusual ways. As I will contend in a later section, alterations to traditionally

²¹ Traditional sounds include steel guitar, fiddle, and a heavy twang. Pop sounds include lush scoring and little to no accent. Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 2, 8; Malone, “Country Music,” 4:855.

²² Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 7.

²³ Jocelyn R. Neal, “Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 29 (Spring 2007): 42.

²⁴ Horn, “‘Keepin’ It Country’,” 462-463.

rigid song structures or instrumentation rules tend to remain within the framework of supporting the clarity and meaning of the lyrics.

Several scholars of country music in addition to Horn address the genre's notable lyrical emphasis. For example, C.R. Chandler, Paul H. Chalfant, and Craig P. Chalfant assert that,

The analysis of country lyrics is much less difficult than that of the lyrics of other music for three reasons: the thrust of the story told in the song is presented in unambiguous fashions; lyrics tend to present an individual situation in some detail; and the words are given more emphasis than the music, with a "commercial lyric" being more important than a "commercial sound."²⁵

In addition, George H. Lewis, a sociologist who studied and wrote about country music extensively, offers a slightly different perspective on the topic of country music's lyrical emphasis:

Modern American country music, perhaps more than most other forms of popular song in this country, deals frankly and openly with the everyday trials, troubles, hopes, fears and dreams of its audience. The messages in the lyrics of these songs are clear and simply put.²⁶

On the other hand, Lawler, a poetry scholar, believes that the lyrics hold much more than what the surface reveals, and states several times that "country music is not for dummies."²⁷ Regardless, the emphasis on lyrics in country music is important because, as

²⁵ C.R. Chandler, Paul H. Chalfant, and Craig P. Chalfant, "Cheaters Sometimes Win: Sexual Infidelity in Country Music," in *Forbidden Fruits: Taboos and Tabooism in Culture*, ed. Ray Broadus Browne (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University, 1984), 137.

²⁶ Lewis, "Interpersonal Relations," 229.

²⁷ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 6.

Charles Jaret and Jacqueline Boles write, lyrics “both reinforce our beliefs, values, and attitudes and help to form or guide them.”²⁸

Moreover, country music audiences generally expect the lyrics to portray real, or at least plausible, stories and emotions, focusing on issues that are common in the lives of both the performers and the audience members.²⁹ Therefore the most common topic is love in its many positive and negative iterations, but God also makes frequent appearances, along with a glorification of the rustic or rural lifestyle from which the music supposedly evolved, a lifestyle which arguably never truly existed.³⁰ According to Edward G. Armstrong’s “Country Music Sex Songs: An Ethnomusicological Account,” the standard themes of country music are

both fulfilling and unsatisfying love relationships, home and family, country, work, individual worth, rugged individualism, and patriotism. . . . It is suggested that these themes and perspectives reflect the common experiences of the audience of working-class adults and support a resurgence of political conservatism.³¹

A slightly different opinion on the subject of common lyrical themes comes from Lawler, who asserts that the main topics of country lyrics are “war, peace, growing old, loneliness, discrimination, love, dying . . . , dancing and drinking and fighting.”³² Furthermore, in discussing the lyrics of “You Never Even Called Me by My Name”

²⁸ Charles Jaret and Jacqueline Boles, “Sounds of Seduction: Sex and Alcohol in Country Music Lyrics,” in *America’s Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society*, ed. Kenneth J. Bindas (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 257.

²⁹ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 3, 42.

³⁰ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 3, 7; Chandler, et al., “Cheaters Sometimes Win,” 134; Lewis, “Lap Dancer or Hillbilly Deluxe,” 166, 167.

³¹ Edward G. Armstrong, “Country Music Sex Songs: An Ethnomusicological Account,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 22 (August, 1986): 370.

³² Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 7-8.

(1975), a satirical song performed by David Allan Coe, Neal notes that “while trains and rain and pick-ups and prison are unquestionably topical signifiers of the genre, family and faith form another key strand, woven throughout country’s texts.”³³ This emphasis on supposed reality in country music, combined with the importance of the lyrics, sets it apart from other genres.³⁴

Another key feature in country music is the idea that performers sing about what they know, that their lyrics and performances reflect an “authentic” view of their own lives;³⁵ to quote a popular Trace Adkins tune, “they’re all just songs about me.”³⁶ Country music’s listeners expect to hear pieces of themselves in the music while also expecting to hear pieces of the performer. In any type of vocal music, the lyrics offer the simplest way to express oneself clearly. Thus, this emphasis on “authentic” performances in country music connects to an emphasis on the lyrics over other parts of the music.

Importantly, the country tradition of songwriters being a somewhat distinct group from vocalists means that songwriters frequently assist in the construction of singers’ public personae, especially when the singer engages in collaborative songwriting. Although country music maintains a reputation for authenticity in its expression, it is truly impossible to know another person’s inner thoughts. Instead, country music is one of many cultural expressions offered for interpretation by the public. Based on this, it is

³³ Neal, “Narrative Paradigms,” 42.

³⁴ George H. Lewis, “Interpersonal Relations and Sex-Role Conflict in Modern American Country Music,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 20 (Dec. 1989): 229.

³⁵ Loretta Lynn with George Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 73, 77, 79, 92.

³⁶ Trace Adkins, “Songs About Me” (2004).

logical to conclude that each country music performer has a distinct persona, and her song selection contributes a great deal to the creation and maintenance of that persona.

Thus in spite of an expectation of authenticity in country performances,³⁷ artists throughout country music's post-commercialization history almost always play a character when they sing, and those characters vary depending on the song, even when they perform as themselves. Ultimately, every performance, whether live on stage or in a recording studio, is just that: a performance, an act. Each artist *chooses* what she reveals to an audience. Regardless of how much listeners like to believe that every artist experiences everything he or she sings about, the truth of the matter is that they do not. The longstanding culture of singers performing music written by someone else in country music supports this reality.³⁸ While not necessarily true of everyone in the industry, most performers use music composed by someone else at one point or another, no matter how devotedly they perform their own material.

In order to reconcile this need for authenticity with reality, most artists portray a "country" way of living, whenever they can, meaning that they showcase the parts of their lives that adhere to the country music ideal.³⁹ They emphasize their upbringing, or their current living situation, or both, as they apply to this way of life. Country singers convey this through interviews, biographies and autobiographies, and on-stage commentary. As technology advances, some artists are also exploring the use of the internet and social media to further present their personalities and country-ness.

³⁷ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, 92, 94; Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 150.

³⁸ Examples include Reba McEntire's "Fancy" (1990) and "The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia" (1991); and Miranda Lambert's "The House That Built Me" (2009).

³⁹ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 41.

However, the most basic and well-established method of presenting an “authentic” country persona is through song selection.⁴⁰ Artists generally choose music they can relate to, but even when they do write it, their music is not necessarily about themselves or their experiences. A few examples include Reba McEntire, who almost never writes her own music, but chooses her songs very carefully so that they appeal to the everywoman.⁴¹ Loretta Lynn and Miranda Lambert write or co-write much of their own music, but have chosen plenty of other songs to fit their images as well. A final example is Jennifer Nettles of Sugarland, who wrote the powerful ballad “Stay” (2007) herself, in spite of a lack of life experiences involving infidelity.⁴²

This knowledge in the country music industry that performers do not portray themselves completely accurately to their audiences is one traditional aspect of country performance that has remained relatively unchanged over the long years since public performances and recordings of the genre began. In order to accommodate this dichotomy of authenticity versus reality in country music, I address the content of songs with such phrases as “the song’s narrator” or “her character.” This indicates that each song reflects choices made by the artists and their teams of managers, producers, and musicians, in order to continue to project an image of an “authentic” country lifestyle.

⁴⁰ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 150.

⁴¹ Ibid., 103.

⁴² Roznovsky, “The Story Behind Sugarland’s ‘Stay’.”

The Influence of Feminism on Country Music

This study addresses a more mainstream, common, and straightforward gender dynamic than many others do, especially in relation to the idea of women as idealized mother figures in contrast with “honky-tonk angels.”⁴³ Gender studies in popular music and especially in country music tend to focus more on the outliers, on gender-bending, trans-performances, and homosexuality and/or homoerotic imagery, because an interdisciplinary approach adds an extra level of academic legitimacy to what some may see as a topic that is otherwise not worth examining closely. Lundy supports the fact of this perception of country by outsiders when she states that “country music, as a form of mass media, has perhaps received less attention as a shaper or reflector of social behavior because of its image in the field of social research as an artistic and intellectual wasteland.”⁴⁴ However, Lundy continues with the argument that country music as a genre deserves adequate attention from academia as a standalone topic, not least because “popular music is considered to be a significant socializing mechanism that both transmits and reflects norms regarding all social behavior, including the way men and women should act.”⁴⁵

Due to an old tradition of significantly more men’s than women’s involvement in the production and performance of country music, as well as a reluctance to allow women

⁴³ This quotes Kitty Wells landmark single from 1952, “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels,” and is one of many names for “bad” women. Wells’ song, like several others, such as Tammy Wynette’s “Stand By Your Man” (1968) and Loretta Lynn’s “Coal Miner’s Daughter” (1970), helped create a name for a concept, archetype, or stereotype that became part of country’s vernacular. Cooper, “Honky Tonks, Jukeboxes, and Wild, Wild Women,” 664; *Encyclopedia of Women*, s.vv. “The Feminist Movement,” “Gender Stereotypes.”

⁴⁴ Lundy, “Women and Country Music,” 213.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

to participate in the industry independently of men, country music presents an especially fertile ground for discussing gender relations.⁴⁶ Not only do women participate in the production of country music much less than men do, but the women portrayed by country music tend to fit into a few narrow molds. As an example, Lundy asserts that in the lyrics of country music, a woman's value comes "primarily through her ability to get and keep a man."⁴⁷ She notes that country's lyrics rarely mention anyone in a woman's life besides her male romantic partner.⁴⁸

Further, abundant evidence supports the idea that in order to fit the mold of a wholesome or "good" woman as portrayed in country music, a woman must fill at least one of only a few acceptable roles: monogamous "lover, wife, or mother."⁴⁹ Other scholars offer alternative ways to label the roles available to women in country music, such as B. Lee Cooper referring to them as "sexy vixens or damsels in distress," or George H. Lewis discussing their choice "between acting like the 'honky tonk angel' or like 'mamma.'"⁵⁰ Lewis continues that a woman in country music is expected to be "free and sexual enough to attract a man but, at the same time, be socially responsible enough that she, like mamma before her, can be considered a legitimate candidate for

⁴⁶ Phyllis Stark, "Country Girls Just Wanna Have Hits," *Billboard* 118(13) 37-38, 1 April 2006; Mary A. Bufwack and Robert Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music, 1800-2000*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Country Music Foundation, 2003), 304.

⁴⁷ Lundy, "Women and Country Music," 214.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁰ Respectively: Cooper, "Honky Tonks, Jukeboxes, and Wild, Wild Women," 664; Lewis, "Interpersonal Relations," 235.

marriage.”⁵¹ In contrast, socially irresponsible women are viewed as “sexual buddies and pals, . . . but they will never become wives, or if they do, they will never be true.”⁵² This also extends to the personae developed by the performers themselves.

However, in her 1992 article, “Women and Country Music,” Lundy acknowledged that “changes in the way women view men and themselves in country music” were at least beginning to emerge.⁵³ While the way that men portray women in their music lags behind the progress made in women’s portrayal of themselves and their interpersonal relationships, women in the country music industry nevertheless are starting to question, as Lundy phrases it, “the authority of men” and quite often express “dissatisfaction with their drinking, cheating, and outlaw behavior.”⁵⁴

In spite of a predominately female audience for the genre,⁵⁵ the number of songs by female performers on the *Billboard* year-end country songs charts between 1962 and 2015 peaks at only forty percent. Furthermore, the proportion of women in the industry continues to lag behind the balance in the general population and does not accurately reflect the representation of women in the country audience. It took country executives a long time to figure out that their mostly-female audiences wanted to hear voices like their own, rather than exclusively wanting “to hear men say the things their own guys can’t or

⁵¹ Lewis, “Interpersonal Relations,” 235.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Lundy, “Women and Country Music,” 214.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 84; Stark, “Country Girls Just Wanna Have Hits.”

won't," as Phyllis Stark phrased it in her 2006 article for *Billboard*.⁵⁶ In fact, some in the industry today continue to believe that country music is simply not a woman's art.⁵⁷

Yet there are notable women in country music who have actively worked towards the inclusion of more female performers and the presentation of women's perspectives in country music since the 1950s. Many country music scholars and performers identify Kitty Wells' breakout hit, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" (1952), as the beginning of the "slow rebellion in defense of women."⁵⁸ Additionally, Loretta Lynn's appearance on the country music scene in 1960 marks the emergence of a prominent feminist voice in the industry, paving the way for the women who followed her. Lynn successfully worked against the career-limiting idea of being a "girl singer" herself, as well as against the concept in general.⁵⁹ Wells and Lynn, among others, opened new doors for women in country music, enabling remarkable country women in the years since to find success in the industry.

If not for those who came onto the country music scene in the past, women in the industry now would not have the artistic freedoms that they do, such as the ability to approach social issues with minimal scandal. A recent example of a song made possible by past and recent changes for and by women in country music is Miranda Lambert's song "Babies Makin' Babies" (2014). The opening verse mentions that "two kids from

⁵⁶ Stark, "Country Girls Just Wanna Have Hits."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, 118; Lundy, "Women and Country Music," 217.

⁵⁹ Later sections address Lynn and her career significantly, as she contributes to this study more than any other performer.

Tacoma” have “no pill / and [are] barely old enough to drink.”⁶⁰ This casual mention in a country song of sex, birth control, and specifically the pill, was nearly unthinkable as recently as twenty years ago. Yet Loretta Lynn broke the initial barrier to such a song when she discussed similar sentiments more than twice that long ago, in her single “The Pill” (1975). Many country radio stations banned the song on moral grounds, but this only made the song more popular, especially among Lynn’s female fans. Lynn publicly discussed that she recorded “The Pill” a few years before its release, but she and her management team did not think the country world would receive it well at that time.⁶¹

Still, in 1975, “The Pill” was a major statement to make, especially for the country music industry. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved hormonal birth control for use by women in the United States, most commonly prescribed in pill form, fifteen years before Lynn’s single hit the country music market, so it was not particularly new by then. But in spite of Lynn breaking a major country music taboo against the frank and open discussion of female sexuality by a woman, such openness remained unusual for a long time after “The Pill.”

By 2014, however, the casual mention of the pill, or in this case the lack thereof, in Lambert’s song was not as controversial or taboo as it was for Lynn. It would be an unusual lyric for some currently popular female country performers to sing, but Lambert is nearly as famous for her frankness as Lynn was in her heyday. As a performer and songwriter, Lambert discusses such controversial topics as female sexuality and

⁶⁰ In the context of this thesis, a verse is as a recurring song section containing information relevant to the theme or story of the song, set to a distinct melody that reappears each time a verse occurs. Neal, “Narrative Paradigms,” 45.

⁶¹ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 62.

independence and the consequences for male misbehavior as easily as she sings with sincerity of grief for lost loved ones, lost childhoods, and lost loves.⁶²

Whether intentionally or not, Lambert has molded her career so that she follows in Lynn's footsteps fairly closely, especially with regard to honesty in lyrics, in life, and in personal musical style. However, Lambert takes it further than Lynn did, at least in part due to Lynn's own efforts. If Loretta Lynn had not spent her early career sounding unapologetically like herself, Miranda Lambert's increasingly bold lyric topics and genre-mixing, particularly in her inclusion of rock influences, would not go over well with today's country music listeners. Yet both of these women are beloved by generations of fans. This is a small part of the body of evidence that shows women in country music have started, as Lundy puts it, "to demonstrate a more assertive attitude toward sex and the love relationship."⁶³

While this study views the relationship between country music and feminism through the lens of women's cheating songs, two particular recent releases by female performers shed light on that relationship without mentioning romantic infidelity: Maddie and Tae's "Girl in a Country Song" (2015) and Ruthie Collins' "Dear Dolly" (2016). The former illustrates and summarizes the way country lyrics present women, while the latter illustrates and summarizes life as a female country composer and performer. Both of them indicate that feminism's impact is slim to none in certain aspects of country music.

⁶² Miranda Lambert's songs that address female sexuality and independence include her duet with Carrie Underwood, "Somethin' Bad" (2014). Lambert's "White Liar" (2009), "Gunpowder and Lead" (2007), and "Sin for a Sin" (2009) confront misbehaving men. Grief for loved ones, childhoods, and loves is present in "Over You" (2011), "The House That Built Me" (2009), and "Vice" (2016), respectively.

⁶³ Lundy, "Women and Country Music," 218.

Yet their very presence in the country music scene demonstrates that progress occurred and continues to occur.

Maddie and Tae's "Girl in a Country Song" was particularly popular, and proved that women do not appreciate men treating them primarily as objects in a specific informal sub-genre of country music known as "bro-country," in which men sing about partying with pretty girls in rural settings.⁶⁴ Maddie and Tae directly quote or subtly reference the lyrics from songs in this sub-genre in which women rarely have names, are almost always scantily clad and beautiful, and are generally admired only on a surface level. The young duo sings about hating "the way this bikini top chafes" and that their names are not "'Pretty Little Thing,' 'Honey,' or 'Baby.'" They even say to the noticeably and purposely nameless man they address in their song, "Tell me one more time you gotta get you some of that, sure I'll slide on over but you're gonna get slapped." While Maddie and Tae deliberately marketed this song as all in good fun, it makes sharp points about portrayals of women in contemporary country music's lyrics.⁶⁵ However, the song also relies on the old dichotomy of good women and bad girls in country music, as previously addressed. They claim that the portrayal of women in these songs "ain't no way to treat a lady," insinuating that "bro-country" portrays bad girls while the women it features would prefer to be good women.

⁶⁴ Maddie and Tae specifically respond to and arguably roast songs from this sub-genre, from such notable performers as Jason Aldean, Blake Shelton, Luke Bryan, and Florida Georgia Line, among others. Jewly Hight, "Maddie & Tae Fire a Shot at 'Bro Country'," *Rolling Stone*, July 15, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/maddie-tae-fire-a-shot-at-bro-country-20140715> (accessed February 17, 2017).

⁶⁵ Hight, "Maddie & Tae Fire a Shot at 'Bro Country'."

Ruthie Collins co-wrote “Dear Dolly” as part of a trio of female songwriters who made a conscious effort to compose a country song that illustrates how hard they must work to break down barriers for women in the country music industry, even in the 2010s. The song’s title specifically addresses Dolly Parton, who stands as an icon for women who want to make names for themselves in country music. The lyrics contain a pointed reference to Parton’s own songwriting prowess, when Collins sings “you showed me how to believe in a dream and *I will always love you* for that,”⁶⁶ quoting Parton’s biggest and best-known hit as both a singer and a songwriter. The framing of the entire song as a letter to Parton shows respect for the country music industry’s convention of referencing your roots, especially through artists who have influenced you. But one particular line of lyrics in “Dear Dolly” summarizes the song’s central point about life as a woman in the country music industry succinctly: “it’s not that I’m not good enough, but nobody wants to hear little songs from a girl.” This line condemns simultaneously the industry executives’ mistaken belief that country audiences do not want to hear women sing and the condescension they mete out when approached by female vocalists and songwriters.

“Dear Dolly” offers a peek behind the scenes provided by Collins and her co-writers that reveals a notably backwards industry, hidden in plain sight in a nation and an era that have supposedly moved beyond these kinds of problems. However, “Dear Dolly” was recorded and released as a single by the industry its lyrics decry, which is quite a remarkable feat. The same applies to “Girl in a Country Song.” Both of these new, young performing acts touched a nerve with their songs that defer to some country traditions and

⁶⁶ Emphasis added.

conventions while also defying others. The release of these songs as country music singles is notable for the industry's near-acknowledgement of its own sexism.

Country Cheating Songs in Society and the Genre

This study examines the changes in cheating songs since 1962 through the lens of only female lead vocalists. Not only is there an ongoing tug-of-war over the representation of women in country song lyrics, but there is also continuous ebb and flow in the popularity of female performers of country music. Further complicating matters is the gender ratio in the country music audience: there are many more women than men buying and listening to country recordings throughout the post-commercialization history of the genre. Yet in spite of this, the few early women country singers to attain success did so while performing songs that male record executives thought would appeal to the audience, much as male singers did. There were women on stage, but they were singing men's songs.

Then performers like Loretta Lynn came along, writing and selecting songs for their own performances, from their own perspectives, and with the women in their audiences in mind. While her career could not have happened without the assistance of many people, both female and male, directly and indirectly, Loretta Lynn's impact on the country music industry continues to influence and inspire women as they navigate the pitfalls of Nashville. In many different iterations and interpretations, her brand of striving to sing simultaneously as a real person, as a woman, and for the women in the audience has become a hallmark of historically noteworthy and legendary female country singers such as Tammy Wynette, Dolly Parton, Barbara Mandrell, Reba McEntire, The Judds,

Martina McBride, Miranda Lambert, Taylor Swift, Carrie Underwood, and, from the latest crop of young newcomers, Kacey Musgraves.

I selected cheating as the common theme for the songs in this study because it is a well-known trope of country music that foregrounds gender roles and the perceived expectations of country's audience. Cheating songs popularized by women are worth discussing on their own because they differ so greatly from men's cheating songs. Other studies address these differences, but few, if any, do more than scratch the surface in their exploration of *either* gender's cheating songs. For example, the previously referenced C.R. Chandler, et al., study, "Sometimes Cheaters Win: Sexual Infidelity in Country Music," spends much time outlining quantifiable information about men's and women's cheating songs but little time examining the lyrics of individual songs, especially in comparison with one another.⁶⁷

While the performers of cheating songs do not necessarily condone cheating, people also rarely condemn a singer for such songs, even if an unfaithful partner narrates the song. Cheating songs present an unusual and somewhat perplexing view of country music culture. When contemplating what exactly makes cheating such a persistent and prominent country trope, Charles Jaret and Jacqueline Boles' "Sounds of Seduction: Sex and Alcohol in Country Music Lyrics" provides a straightforward answer. In this work, Jaret and Boles explain the "predominance of heterosexual marital affairs" using a couple of factors:

First, country audiences are older than rock, soul, or pop fans; consequently, most are married or divorced and interested in songs reflecting their experiences and problems. Second, the divorce rate is higher among blue-collar than white-collar

⁶⁷ Chandler, et al., "Cheaters Sometimes Win."

couples, and some evidence suggests that blue-collar husbands and wives “cheat” a little more often than do those in the middle class. Cheating can be viewed simultaneously as sinful yet pleasurable, wrong yet somehow right, and they may feel the other sexual themes are much too immoral or controversial to deal with in popular songs.⁶⁸

This explanation of cheating’s ubiquity in the genre touches on both the issues of authenticity in country music and morality in country cheating songs.

In the early years covered by this study and mostly ending as the 1960s came to a close, the country world thought of female performers as merely “girl singers,” an entertaining accessory to a show performed and run by men.⁶⁹ Women and their careers were controlled by the male record executives, they were few and far between, and they certainly were not on the front lines of the infant stages of the Women’s Liberation movement.

The earliest cheating songs in the corpus examined show at least some resignation on the part of the woman to the supposed facts that her man inevitably will stray and that she can do nothing except stand by him and wait for him to see the error of his ways. Kitty Wells’ “Unloved, Unwanted” (1962) and the three male-female duets to qualify from the 1960s provide particularly notable early examples of this attitude.⁷⁰ The duets in this study as a group lament feeling trapped in such an immoral situation, as if cheating inevitably happens to some people, and the lovers cannot or do not want to do anything to alter their situation. Even the most recently released mixed-gender duet, Garth Brooks

⁶⁸ Jaret and Boles, “Sounds of Seduction,” 262.

⁶⁹ Nick Tosches, *Country: The Twisted Roots of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1996), 22-24.

⁷⁰ All four songs are discussed in more detail below. The duets from the 1960s are Willie Nelson and Shirley Collie’s “Willingly” (1962), Dottie West and Jim Reeves’ “Love Is No Excuse” (1964), and Roy Drusky and Priscilla Mitchell’s “Yes, Mr. Peters,” (1965).

and Trisha Yearwood's "In Another's Eyes" (1997), which charted twenty-six years after the previous male-female duet, Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty's "After the Fire Is Gone" (1971), conveys this attitude.⁷¹ This demonstrates that the assumption that an unfaithful partner cheats regardless of the faithful partner's actions continues to present itself throughout the years covered in this thesis.

From resignation to one's lot in life, country's cheating song lyrics move towards women telling men, apparently to the men's surprise, that their infidelity is not and never was a secret, and that it is unacceptable. Loretta Lynn's first appearance in my body of selected songs, in 1965, marks the beginning of this phase, but no one joins her in this approach until Lynn Anderson released "That's a No No" in 1969. Many of these women indicate that they feel either heartbroken or furious, or a mixture of both, but they do not usually end the relationship.

Along the same lines and around the same time, songs address the "other woman" directly. Lynn initiates another phase here, with her iconic hit song, "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" (1966). In these songs, the original female partner acknowledges the existence of the "other woman" and typically tells her to stay away from the man, laying the blame for the infidelity firmly on the shoulders of the mistress rather than the cheating spouse. In either case, whether the narrator addresses the straying

⁷¹ Although Brooks and Yearwood are now married to each other, at the time of this song's release, they were married to other people. They maintain that their relationship was always platonic until neither of them was married. Denise Quan, "Flashback: Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood Gaze 'In Another's Eyes' During Early Duet," *Rolling Stone*, December 10, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/flashback-garth-brooks-trisha-yearwood-gaze-in-anothers-eyes-during-early-duet-20141210> (accessed January 19, 2017).

husband or his lover, a “stand by your man” attitude prevails.⁷² More than that, the narrators frequently strive to be the sole women in their partners’ lives.

The final piece in the evolution, and the stage where country music usually stands today, involves women finding methods of acting on their feelings over occurrences of infidelity, and not always maintaining a relationship with the cheating partner. The first song in this study that presents a woman ending a relationship with an unfaithful partner is The Forester Sisters’ hit “Leave It Alone” (1989) and breakups supersede loyalty as the preferred reaction over time. In these songs, cheating is no longer inevitable and no longer exclusively caused by another women’s involvement, but rather it is within a man’s control and therefore his fault for straying from expected behaviors. The women whose partners cheat typically break up with the man, sometimes in a dramatic fashion and with additional reactions, such as going a little wild themselves, drinking, smashing the man’s truck, or committing retaliatory adultery.⁷³

Throughout this apparent evolution, anomalies occur, as with any such progression. Loretta Lynn arrived at the angry, no-secrets phase more quickly than her peers did, largely due to her frankness as a person and a performer.⁷⁴ Songs by an outside narrator and songs told from the “other woman’s” perspective are somewhat out of place among the other music in this study. Songs by an outside narrator typically present the

⁷² Tammy Wynette’s famous “Stand By Your Man” (1968) does not qualify for inclusion in this study but quintessentially displays the attitude that men inevitably misbehave in ways that hurt the woman who love them.

⁷³ Carrie Underwood sings about destroying a truck in “Before He Cheats” (2006). A man’s truck strongly symbolizes self and masculinity in country music; Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 2. Examples of retaliatory adultery include Loretta Lynn’s “You’ve Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)” (1968) and Miranda Lambert’s “White Liar” (2009).

⁷⁴ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, xiv, 118.

story of infidelity as a moral tale, with a lesson worth learning. The songs from the “other woman’s” perspective vary somewhat in their approach: some address the situation’s morality, while others do not; some of the women stay with the married man, while others do not. A few songs also give ultimatums, allowing the straying partner to choose, rather than the faithful partner ending the relationship outright, including “It’s Your Call” (1993) by Reba McEntire. The only song in the study in which a solo narrator portrays the lone cheating partner is “Change of Heart” (1988) by The Judds. The woman in this song sees the error of her ways and begs her partner to stay with her and give her another chance.

Due to a heavy reliance on tradition in country music, many recent hits share a similar sentiment with the older songs in this study. Either they are in the same vein as much of Loretta Lynn’s repertoire, in which the narrator gets mad and sometimes gets even, or, less often, they remain in the “stand by your man” tradition. This is merely one facet of the cyclical nature of country music history. Even a recent increase in the popularity of multi-singer, harmonizing groups reflects the very early commercial era of country music.⁷⁵ Members of the country music industry periodically make efforts to “return to their roots,” a phrase which means both a great deal and nothing whatsoever. In other words, country performers want to sound like their predecessors, especially those they claim as influences. But they also want to sound like their idealized version of country, which frequently conflicts with the actual history they claim to emulate. This

⁷⁵ The Carter Family is easily the most famous of the early family bands in country music. Malone, “Country Music,” 4:854.

phrase can also reference returning to a supposedly simpler, rural lifestyle—an idealized version of real life that country music enjoys presenting but likely never truly existed.⁷⁶

Additionally, although some in the industry resist moving forward socially, the period of modern history represented by this study's body of songs shows that women in American society are no longer expected to turn a blind eye to their spouses' infidelity. In spite of numerous complicating factors such as resistance to social progress due to an artist's own personal beliefs or the perceived personal beliefs of the country music audience, contemporary lyrics about cheating reflect changes in women's attitudes since the 1950s. The "other woman" is no longer fully expected to wait around for a married man. Not only do women acknowledge cheating, they also take action against it. And yet, country music's inclusion of these changing attitudes began in the mid-1960s. What makes the early twenty-first century's crop of cheating songs truly different from the early acknowledgements of infidelity is the performers and writers themselves, who grew up in a more progressive era than their predecessors did. Some evidence presents change over time, and some presents little to no change, but overall, this reflects the individual nature of each song's perspective.

At first glance, the songs that qualify for this study appear to support the idea that women's cheating songs evolve over time in a way that reflects social change over the same period, but closer examination reveals that neither the songs nor the social expectations advance in a purely linear fashion. While it is fair to say that much has changed in country music since 1962, it is also true that a great deal depends on the artists as individuals, and therefore little has changed. Perhaps the biggest difference between

⁷⁶ Jenkins, "Country Music Tradition," 46.

today's cheating songs by women and yesteryear's is the amount of choice and license in their performances and lives that women possess today. While country music as an industry strives to continue unchanged, the fluidity of the genre also merits acknowledgment and examination.

CHOICES MADE: METHODS AND RESULTS

As previously discussed, part of what makes country music's most popular songs ripe for analysis as a representative slice of Americana is the importance of lyrics in the genre. There is an emphasis on clarity for the audience in the sense of both hearing the lyrics clearly and understanding what the lyrics mean. Frequently, songs employ puns and plays on words, but clever diction never obscures the true meaning of a song or its story.⁷⁷ The lyrical emphasis in country music offers an excellent tool for choosing songs for a corpus of study. Choosing one lyrical topic, in this case infidelity in romantic relationships, helps to narrow the large field of country music to a more manageably sized group. Yet, as Edward G. Armstrong asserts, "consistency of topic does not preclude paradoxical portrayals."⁷⁸ Although Armstrong goes on to make the following statement about the entire genre of country music, it also applies to this study's small selection of cheating songs: "The most significant feature of the lyrics is their fundamental diversity."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 5, 43; Neal "Narrative Paradigms," 62; Armstrong, "Country Music Sex Songs," 371-372; Lundy, "Women and Country Music," 213-214.

⁷⁸ Armstrong, "Country Music Sex Songs," 377.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Within the chosen subject matter for this study, country music is incredibly diverse. Not only do the lyrics in cheating songs address the issue in many different ways, but the musical content differs too. Women's cheating songs spotlight a variety of instruments, from more traditional country sounds such as acoustic guitar, fiddle, and pedal steel guitar, to influences from a wide range of genres.⁸⁰ Piano appears often and is used in various ways, such as to evoke the sounds of a honky-tonk, as in Tanya Tucker's "Blood Red and Goin' Down" (1973) or as support for the jazzy sound provided by the saxophone in Reba McEntire's "Take It Back" (1992). Instruments imported from other genres include electric guitar, which crossed over from rock music and gradually increased in popularity with country musicians over the years to the point of ubiquity. Other sounds heard in this study include harmonica, banjo, and resonator guitar.⁸¹ Further, this group of songs is diverse in its use of meter, tempo, phrasing, and macro-level forms. For example, while country music relies heavily on the use of a verse-chorus form, the way each song's composer(s) alters that form is unique.⁸²

⁸⁰ "Steel guitar" refers to either a method of playing or a type of guitar. The method involves using a steel slide to adjust a string's pitch. The type of guitar includes several instruments based on the acoustic lap steel guitar, all of which omit frets for "open tuning." Pedal steel guitar is an electric version of a lap steel guitar with a series of pedals that expand pitch possibilities, and produces one of country music's trademark sounds. Gordon Ross, "The Guitar in Country Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, ed. Victor Anand Coelho (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 133, 140.

⁸¹ A resonator guitar is an acoustic guitar with a metal device set into it that amplifies without electricity. The inclusion of metal also alters the sound of the guitar somewhat, distinguishing it from both acoustic and electric guitars. Resonator guitar is sometimes called a "Dobro," which comes from the luthier company that perfected the construction of the instrument. Ross, "The Guitar in Country Music," 140.

⁸² Footnote 60 defines "verse." The lyrics of choruses serve to summarize and synthesize the information provided in a song's verses while its melody offers musical contrast to other sections. Both the lyrics and the melody typically remain unchanged in each occurrence of the chorus. A "verse-chorus form" is song that contains alternating verses and choruses as its basic building blocks. As with any musical form, this outline is often altered to aid in artistic expression. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms," 45; Mark and Cathy Liggett, *The Complete Handbook of Songwriting: An Insider's Guide to Making it in the Music Industry* (New York: Plume Books, 1985), 12; John Braheny, *The Craft and Business of Song Writing* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 1988), 67.

This study begins with the songs from 1962 for several reasons. While the 1960s were an important decade for women, social change, women's rights, and feminism, the simplest reason is that the *Billboard* year-end country songs charts, from which I extracted the material, began that year.⁸³ But Loretta Lynn, widely regarded as a living legend of country music, also joined the Grand Ole Opry that year, a short two years after she released her first single, "I'm a Honky Tonk Girl" (1960), and famously traveled around the country with her husband, promoting it to radio stations in person on the way to landing her first Opry performance.⁸⁴ It was also two years after the FDA approved oral hormonal contraceptives for sale to and use by the general (married) public, the year Helen Gurley Brown published *Sex and the Single Girl*, and the year before Betty Friedan published her famous and influential *Feminine Mystique*.⁸⁵

While this particular thesis focuses on the influence of feminism, other shifts in American society, culture, and values also contribute to country music's ongoing evolution. For example, this study's opening year, 1962, saw two events that influenced American and, more specifically, Southern culture, which shares strong ties with country music culture: the Supreme Court declared mandatory prayer in schools unconstitutional in the United States, and James Meredith became the first black student to register at the

⁸³ Prior to 1962, *Billboard* magazine published a single chart in its final issue of the year that listed the top songs by airplay, as reported by radio stations, regardless of genre.

⁸⁴ Brian Mansfield, ed., *Grand Ole Opry: Picture History Book*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Gaylord Entertainment Company, 2009) 13:64; Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, 80-82.

⁸⁵ Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, fiftieth anniversary ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2013).

University of Mississippi.⁸⁶ These significant cultural markers led to a shift in the social environment commonly associated with country music; rural and/or southern Americans began to view the world differently from past decades.

In order to facilitate this study's focus on popular tastes in country music, I used *Billboard* magazine's year-end country songs charts from 1962 through 2015 as source material. The magazine has tracked America's musical taste for decades, in ever more specific, scientific, and digital ways.⁸⁷ Its year-end charts indicate which songs are most popular in any given year, and the magazine's archive breaks them down by genre beginning in 1962. I chose to pull data from the year-end charts as they are simultaneously more concise and more over-arching than *Billboard*'s weekly charts. *Billboard* publishes each year-end chart in one of the last few issues of the year.⁸⁸ Although twenty-two of the year-end country songs charts examined do not list any cheating songs by a female lead singer, fifteen of the remaining charts hold more than one, which brings the total number of songs for inclusion in this study to fifty.⁸⁹

Because the number of songs included on *Billboard*'s charts varied from year to year, I examined the lyrical content and performance forces of 3475 songs, out of which

⁸⁶ Steven I. Engel, et al. v. William J. Vitale, Jr., et al., 370 U.S. 421 (1962); U.S. Marshals Service History, "The U.S. Marshals and the Integration of the University of Mississippi: 40 Years Ago and the Present," U.S. Marshals Service, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/miss/index.html> (accessed February 15, 2017).

⁸⁷ *Billboard* Magazine began in 1894, but did not include rankings for music until 1940. In 1991, *Billboard* began using the Nielsen Soundscan system for airplay reporting. Prior to that, *Billboard* compiled charts using self-reported information about airplay from radio stations around the country. Cliff Radcliff, "Billboard Celebrates 100 Years of Hits," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 3, 1994. <http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=19941103&slug=1939453> (accessed January 31, 2017).

⁸⁸ For example, the year-end charts for 1976 appeared in the December 25, 1976 issue. In order to facilitate this, *Billboard*'s year is offset from the calendar year by a few weeks: the same issue notes that the year-end charts for 1976 were "Compiled from weekly charts issue dates Nov. 9, 1975-Oct. 30, 1976."

⁸⁹ See the Appendix on page 141 for a complete listing of songs examined.

at least one female lead vocalist performed twenty-five percent, or 868 songs.⁹⁰ The first few years to qualify for inclusion in the study contain the lowest percentage of female voices on the year-end charts, which contributes to the impression of a steady increase in the popularity of female performers over the last fifty-five years.⁹¹ However, two distinct peaks in the number of female performers on country's year-end songs charts occur in 1978 and 1998; in each of these years, women contributed forty percent of the music on the year-end charts. A long-standing country tradition of collaboration between independent performing acts is also reflected in the charts examined. Collaborative works with other performers or group acts, both male and female, make up eleven percent of the songs performed by at least one female vocalist. In more recent years, duos and groups with female vocalists experienced a gradual increase in popularity. Such a group appeared on a chart examined for the first time in 1976.⁹² Further, mixed-gender performing groups reached their peak popularity in 2012 with eleven songs, or forty-four percent of women's songs, on the year-end country songs chart.⁹³

⁹⁰ Each year included either fifty, sixty, seventy-five, or one hundred songs on its chart.

⁹¹ The first two years examined in this study, 1962 and 1963, contained fourteen percent women's voices and ten percent, respectively. By 2015, women's voices only made up twenty percent of the year-end country songs chart. The overall proportion for all of the years examined is twenty-five percent.

⁹² The first mixed-gender group in the charts examined is Dave & Sugar, a trio in which "Dave" was Dave Rowland and "Sugar" was two women, originally Vicki Hackeman and Jackie Frantz, with "The Door is Always Open" (1976). Several different pairs of women filled the roles of "Sugar" over the years the trio was active. Sandra Brennan, "Dave and Sugar: Artist Biography," All Music, <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/dave-sugar-rowland-mn0001411997> (accessed February 15, 2017).

⁹³ Table 1 on page 37 condenses the data presented in this paragraph.

Table 1.

Quantitative Data For Source Material	
Total <i>Billboard</i> year-end country songs charts examined	54
Total songs examined	3475
Total songs featuring a female lead vocalist	868
Songs by duos and groups with female vocalists	143
Women's collaborative songs (duets)	99
<i>Billboard</i> charts containing no qualifying songs	22
<i>Billboard</i> charts containing more than one qualifying song	15
Number of songs qualified for this study	50

The following criteria narrow down the extensive pool of songs originally examined to the body of music evaluated and discussed in this study. Songs must appear on at least one year-end country songs chart published by *Billboard* from 1962 through 2015. Furthermore, songs must feature at least one female singer and lyrics that clearly discuss past or present cheating. This excludes future, possible, or hypothetical cheating. Therefore, I did not examine either songs that warn against men straying, such as many made popular by Tammy Wynette, or songs addressed to women who display interest in the narrators' partners, as in well-known songs like Dolly Parton's "Jolene" (1973) and Gretchen Wilson's "Homewrecker" (2005). These criteria aid in analyzing the way popular, mainstream country music views and treats the common trope of infidelity when presented by women. For the purposes of this thesis, words and phrases such as "cheating," "infidelity," and "illicit relationship" mean that one or both members of a

monogamous relationship or marriage participates in at least one additional romantic liaison.⁹⁴

Fifty songs performed by thirty-seven distinct performing acts in thirty-three unique combinations fit these criteria, two of which appear on the *Billboard* year-end country songs charts twice.⁹⁵ In chronological order of their first appearance on the list, the following performers qualify for examination in this study with more than one recording: Loretta Lynn, Tanya Tucker, Barbara Mandrell, Naomi Judd, Wynonna Judd, Reba McEntire, Patty Loveless, Martina McBride, Carrie Underwood, and Sara Evans. In 1986, songs by duos and groups began to qualify for this study. Those duos and groups include The Judds, The Forester Sisters, Sugarland, The Band Perry, and Little Big Town. Three of these five groups are “family bands,” an old tradition in country music, dating back to well before country’s commercialization and made most famous by the Carter Family.⁹⁶ These songs represent six percent of the songs performed by at least one female vocalist that appeared on a year-end country songs chart from 1962 through 2015. This study features six each of collaborative releases and performances by duos or groups.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Mainstream country music focuses on heterosexual relationships, due to the assumed conservatism of the genre’s audience. However, some homoeroticism appears on the *Billboard* country charts in recent years, such as Little Big Town’s “Girl Crush.” Released in 2014, it appeared at number two on *Billboard*’s 2015 year-end country songs chart. Jaret and Boles, “Sounds of Seduction,” 262.

⁹⁵ Carrie Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” appears on charts for two different years, as does Reba McEntire’s “Turn On the Radio.” For a complete list of songs included in the corpus of this study, see the Appendix on page 141.

⁹⁶ Malone, “Country Music,” 4:854.

⁹⁷ Table 2 on page 39 summarizes the data presented in this paragraph.

Table 2.

Quantitative Data For Qualifying Songs	
Total songs qualified for this study	50
Songs that appear on multiple charts	2
Distinct performing acts	37
Unique combinations of performance forces	33
Number of artists who contribute multiple songs	10
Songs performed by duos and groups	6
Songs performed by duets	6
Songs composed by one or more men	25
Songs composed by one or more women	13
Songs composed by men and women in collaboration	12

Interesting patterns emerge by categorizing the characters portrayed in women's hit cheating songs by the relational roles they play. By a large margin, the men rather than the women in these songs fill the role of unfaithful partner. Fifty songs contain mention or representation of fifty-seven cheaters, thirteen of whom narrate their songs. Forty-three songs contain mention of only one cheater, while the remaining seven discuss two cheaters. These seven comprise four duets, two instances of reciprocal cheating, and one song from the perspective of a married mistress. Of the fifty-seven total cheaters, only nine are women while the remaining forty-eight are men.⁹⁸ All seven songs that contain more than one cheater feature a male cheater and a female cheater. The remaining female cheaters are presented in a third-person morality tale and a first-person

⁹⁸ Table 3 on page 40 lists all songs in this study containing female cheaters, while Table 4 on page 41 does the same for male cheaters.

confessional: “Blood Red and Goin’ Down” by Tanya Tucker and “Change of Heart” (1988) by The Judds, respectively.

Qualitatively speaking, this study breaks down into several smaller, representative categories that shed light on women’s cheating songs and the way they reflect changing gender relations since 1962 in various ways. Of these categories, one is much larger than the rest and represents a standard or baseline against which the remaining categories are juxtaposed. The remainder of this section contains brief introductions to each category, while more detailed discussions of the categories follow in the sections below.

Table 3.

Songs in Which Women Cheat on Their Partners		
Year	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)
1962	"Willingly"	Willie Nelson feat. Shirley Collie
1964	"Love Is No Excuse"	Dottie West and Jim Reeves
1968	"You've Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)"	Loretta Lynn
1971	"After the Fire Is Gone"	Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty
1973	"Blood Red and Goin' Down"	Tanya Tucker
1977	"Married But Not to Each Other"	Barbara Mandrell
1989	"Change of Heart"	The Judds
1997	"In Another's Eyes"	Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood
2010	"White Liar"	Miranda Lambert

Table 4.

Songs in Which Men Cheat on Their Partners		
Year	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)
1962	"Unloved, Unwanted"	Kitty Wells
1962	"Willingly"	Willie Nelson feat. Shirley Collie
1964	"Wine, Women and Song"	Loretta Lynn
1964	"Love Is No Excuse"	Dottie West and Jim Reeves
1965	"Yes, Mr. Peters"	Roy Drusky and Priscilla Mitchell
1965	"Happy Birthday"	Loretta Lynn
1966	"You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)"	Loretta Lynn
1968	"Fist City"	Loretta Lynn
1968	"You've Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)"	Loretta Lynn
1969	"Woman of the World (Leave My World Alone)"	Loretta Lynn
1969	"That's a No No"	Lynn Anderson
1971	"After the Fire Is Gone"	Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty
1975	"When Will I Be Loved"	Linda Ronstadt
1977	"Married But Not to Each Other"	Barbara Mandrell
1978	"Woman to Woman"	Barbara Mandrell
1979	"(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right"	Barbara Mandrell
1981	"Who's Cheatin' Who"	Charly McClain
1982	"Nobody"	Sylvia
1986	"Have Mercy"	The Judds
1986	"Whoever's In New England"	Reba McEntire
1987	"The Way We Make a Broken Heart"	Rosanne Cash
1990	"Leave It Alone"	The Forester Sisters
1991	"Rumor Has It"	Reba McEntire
1992	"I Saw the Light"	Wynonna Judd

1992	"Some Kind of Trouble"	Tanya Tucker
1993	"Blame It on Your Heart"	Patty Loveless
1993	"Does He Love You"	Reba McEntire with Linda Davis
1993	"It's Your Call"	Reba McEntire
1993	"Take It Back"	Reba McEntire
1994	"Life #9"	Martina McBride
1997	"She Drew a Broken Heart"	Patty Loveless
1997	"In Another's Eyes"	Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood
2001	"When God-Fearin' Women Get the Blues"	Martina McBride
2002	"Forgive"	Rebecca Lynn Howard
2006-2007	"Before He Cheats"	Carrie Underwood
2006	"Cheatin'"	Sara Evans
2008	"Should've Said No"	Taylor Swift
2008	"Stay"	Sugarland
2010	"White Liar"	Miranda Lambert
2010-2011	"Turn On the Radio"	Reba McEntire
2011	"You Lie"	The Band Perry
2011	"From a Table Away"	Sunny Sweeney
2011	"Look It Up"	Ashton Shepherd
2012	"My Heart Can't Tell You No"	Sara Evans
2012	"Ex-Old Man"	Kristen Kelly
2013	"Two Black Cadillacs"	Carrie Underwood
2013	"Tornado"	Little Big Town
2013	"Merry Go 'Round"	Kacey Musgraves

The largest category encompasses thirty-three out of the study's fifty songs, and in all of them the female narrator is in a committed relationship with a man who

participates in an illicit affair. Although this particular topical thread connects these songs, it is a tenuous connection at best, as the narrators' reactions to being cheated on differ greatly from one to the next. The treatments of this particular subtopic of cheating songs vary chronologically and topically from Kitty Wells' 1962 hit, "Unloved, Unwanted," which is hardly more than a lament, to Little Big Town's much more recent hit, "Tornado" (2012), in which the woman lets the cheating man know that he chose to mess with a woman who will destroy his whole world.

Several other possible perspectives from which to present a cheating tale are available to female country musicians. While the most common is that of a woman whose partner cheated, sometimes the narrator cheats on her partner. In eight of the fifty songs in this study, the female narrator simultaneously participates in romantic relationships with more than one man. These eight songs include such different hit singles as Barbara Mandrell's "Married But Not to Each Other" (1977), in which the cheating pair indicate no desire to change, and The Judds' "Change of Heart," in which the cheating partner sees the error of her ways and asks for forgiveness.

Sometimes the mistress narrates a song. Twelve songs out of the study's fifty present infidelity from this perspective, and duets contribute half of that number. Standouts in this group include "Does He Love You" by Reba McEntire with Linda Davis (1993), the only duet in the study by two women rather than a mixed-gender pair. McEntire sings as the wife while Davis sings as the mistress, and they direct their words to each other. Another remarkable song in this category is Sugarland's "Stay" (2007), unique in that it presents the "other woman" finding her own courage to end her illicit relationship. This song is similar in sentiment to the previously mentioned song by The

Judds, “Change of Heart,” except that The Judds’ song indicates that the man plans to leave his unfaithful partner, and this causes her to finally end her wanderings. In “Stay,” the woman depicted finds reasons within herself to end an unsatisfying relationship; unusually, the impetus is internal rather than external.

Additionally, several women’s hit cheating songs utilize a third-person perspective, distinct from the majority first-person songs. These songs either tell the story of the consequences of infidelity or offer social commentary, or combine the two to some extent. Many songs in this study lend themselves to easy interpretation as cautionary moral stories, but these third-person perspective hits do so to a greater extent. A very young Tanya Tucker found early success with one such extreme musical morality tale, “Blood Red and Goin’ Down,” in which she portrays a ten-year-old girl who watches her father murder her mother and her mother’s lover. Typically, these third-person perspective songs also fit into other categories that are delineated by lyrical characteristics other than the narrator’s perspective.

In addition to these four perspectives from which singers choose to narrate, a couple of groups of songs whose lyrics present unusual situations involving cheating help provide evidence for feminism’s influence in country music. This study examines songs from the three first-person perspectives mentioned above, as well as from two more categories based on the following atypical situations: songs that include encounters between a faithful woman and the woman with whom her partner cheated, and songs in which women find creative ways to express their dissatisfaction with their partners’ infidelity. The group of songs that present meetings between a female partner and the “other woman” contains a continuum of songs ranging from Loretta Lynn’s famous “You

Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" (1966) to Carrie Underwood's recent "Two Black Cadillacs" (2012). Women's creative expressions of dissatisfaction range from mild to extreme, and include both general destruction and reciprocation of infidelity. Examples include Martina McBride's "When God-Fearin' Women Get the Blues" (2001) and Miranda Lambert's "White Liar" (2009), respectively.

Overall, the structure of the remainder of this thesis can be seen as presentations of standard examples contrasted with nonstandard ones, on both a large scale and a smaller scale. The first set of songs examined portray women's reactions to men cheating, which is the most common lyrical approach to cheating in this study's repertory. That section's comparison presents the baseline against which all the remaining sections are contrasted. In other words, male cheaters are presented in direct contrast to the outliers of this study's body of songs, such as female cheaters with varying motivation for their actions. To take this contrast one step further, each section generally begins with a song or group of songs that serve as a backdrop for comparing the section's remaining examples. For instance, the section on female cheaters has subsections that present mixed-gender, dual-cheater duets as the subject's baseline, and songs featuring married women cheating with unmarried men as the deviation from the norm.

MALE CHEATERS: WOMEN'S REACTIONS, THEN AND NOW

The following section focuses on the group of thirty-three songs that is united by the narrator's perspective as a woman whose significant other cheats on her, the most common way that women in this study present infidelity.⁹⁹ Kitty Wells' 1962 hit,

⁹⁹ Table 5 on page 46 contains a complete listing of these thirty-three songs.

“Unloved, Unwanted,” stands out among this large group of songs as the earliest song in the category to qualify for study, and it represents expectations for country women in such situations at the time quite well. I selected Carrie Underwood’s hugely successful “Before He Cheats” (2006) for comparison with Wells’ hit because it made its mark on the country music scene near the end of the years I examined and similarly represents what is expected from country women whose partners cheated in approximately the last fifteen years. When paired together for comparative analysis, these two songs reveal that women’s reactions in cheating songs moved over time from resignation toward retaliation.

Table 5.

Songs From the Perspective of a Woman Whose Partner Cheated		
Year	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)
1962	"Unloved, Unwanted"	Kitty Wells
1964	"Wine, Women and Song"	Loretta Lynn
1965	"Happy Birthday"	Loretta Lynn
1966	"You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)"	Loretta Lynn
1968	"Fist City"	Loretta Lynn
1968	"You've Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)"	Loretta Lynn
1969	"Woman of the World (Leave My World Alone)"	Loretta Lynn
1969	"That's a No No"	Lynn Anderson
1975	"When Will I Be Loved"	Linda Ronstadt
1978	"Woman to Woman"	Barbara Mandrell
1981	"Who's Cheatin' Who"	Charly McClain
1982	"Nobody"	Sylvia
1986	"Have Mercy"	The Judds

1986	"Whoever's In New England"	Reba McEntire
1990	"Leave It Alone"	The Forester Sisters
1991	"Rumor Has It"	Reba McEntire
1992	"I Saw the Light"	Wynonna Judd
1992	"Some Kind of Trouble"	Tanya Tucker
1993	"Blame It on Your Heart"	Patty Loveless
1993	"Does He Love You"	Reba McEntire with Linda Davis
1993	"It's Your Call"	Reba McEntire
1993	"Take It Back"	Reba McEntire
1994	"Life #9"	Martina McBride
2002	"Forgive"	Rebecca Lynn Howard
2006-2007	"Before He Cheats"	Carrie Underwood
2006	"Cheatin'"	Sara Evans
2008	"Should've Said No"	Taylor Swift
2010	"White Liar"	Miranda Lambert
2010-2011	"Turn On the Radio"	Reba McEntire
2011	"You Lie"	The Band Perry
2011	"Look It Up"	Ashton Shepherd
2012	"Ex-Old Man"	Kristen Kelly
2013	"Tornado"	Little Big Town

Kitty Wells' break-out hit, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" (1952), was the first song by a solo female country performer to top *Billboard's* weekly country chart; it made her the first woman to become a true country star. Wells recorded it as a response to Hank Thompson's "The Wild Side of Life" (1952). "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" was so specific in its references to Thompson's song that it utilized the same melody as "The Wild Side of Life" and included the extremely

direct lyric, “as you said in the words of your song.” While the instrumentation and production choices in the two songs are quite different, it could not have been clearer to listeners that Wells’ song responded directly to Thompson’s.

Furthermore, many scholars, such as George H. Lewis, consider Wells’ first single among “the roots of feminine independence” in country music, in spite of its inextricable connections to men through both the song it responds to and its male composer.¹⁰⁰ According to Mary Bufwack and Bob Oermann’s article, “Women in Country Music,”

“It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels,” by Kitty Wells (1952), became the first massively popular woman’s song of self-assertion in country music. This song claimed that every time one found a fallen woman of loose morals it “was because there . . . was a man to blame,” insisting that women’s problems were the result of male domination. Profiting from the success of this initial breakthrough, dozens of women singers of the 1950s and 1960s began recording this type of material.¹⁰¹

After her initial success with a song standing up for country women, Wells released many songs of infidelity and lost love, frequently colored by less gumption than she displayed in her first big hit. Yet Wells is nevertheless considered a pioneer for women in the country music industry, opening the doors for an entire generation of female performers, including Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, Tammy Wynette, and others, by proving that a woman can maintain a wildly popular solo country act, no chaperone or duet partner necessary.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Lewis, “Lap Dancer or Hillbilly Deluxe,” 168.

¹⁰¹ Mary Bufwack and Bob Oermann, “Women in Country Music,” in *Popular Culture in America*, ed. Paul Buhle (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 96.

¹⁰² Bob Millard, *Country Music: 70 Years of America’s Favorite Music* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 88.

In spite of Wells' reputation as the first true female star in country music, her character in "Unloved, Unwanted" was not a particularly empowered woman. The rejected wife frames the song as an open letter to her husband about how sad he made her life, without giving evidence of a direct confrontation or any action on the wife's part to change her status. But the lyrics are not the only clue to the lack of female empowerment in Wells' song; historical context offers some insight in that area as well. Wells originally released "Unloved, Unwanted" in January 1962, before the publication of both Brown's pop success *Sex and the Single Girl* (May 23, 1962) and Friedan's more academic *Feminine Mystique* (February 17, 1963).¹⁰³ Many theorists and historians remark upon Friedan's work in particular as the catalyst for the decades-long second wave of feminism that swept through American society.¹⁰⁴ This timeline alone shows that Wells and her songwriters were not influenced by either book, nor by second-wave feminism in general. That movement was still in its infancy, if not *in utero*, at the time Wells recorded and released "Unloved, Unwanted." However, although Friedan's study focused on middle-class women instead of the working-class women associated with country music lyrics and audiences, Wells' song reflects a part of the experiences of the women Friedan studied and interviewed during the work that inspired her book and as part of the research that enabled her to write it.¹⁰⁵ Thus, "Unloved, Unwanted" serves as a prime example

¹⁰³ Brown's book was hugely popular, partly due to its shock value. Brown was the first woman to publicly discuss the life of a single woman. However, its publication before the second wave of feminism truly began means that it generally does not appear in discussions of influences on that movement. *Encyclopedia on Women and Gender*, s.v. "The Feminist Movement"; Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl*.

¹⁰⁴ *Encyclopedia on Women and Gender*, s.v. "The Feminist Movement"; Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

¹⁰⁵ *Encyclopedia on Women and Gender*, s.v. "The Feminist Movement"; Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*; Jewish Women's Archive, "Publication of 'The Feminine Mystique' by Betty Friedan," Jewish Women's Archive, <https://jwa.org/thisweek/feb/17/1963/betty-friedan> (accessed February 20, 2017).

both of women's standing in the society that provides context for its creation and of the country music of the era.

In 1962, when "Unloved, Unwanted" appeared on the *Billboard* year-end country songs chart, it was important to the country music audience that female narrators who sang about love made it clear that they were married or hoping for marriage, and Wells' song fulfills this expectation perfectly. Accordingly, the option of divorce was much less socially acceptable than it is now, especially for people who tend to lean more conservative, like members of country music's stereotypical audience. Wells' character in "Unloved, Unwanted" duly fills the role socially expected of her as a loyal and dutiful wife who would never consider divorce, regardless of how her husband treats her. When her husband strays to the arms of another woman, Wells' narrator laments his leaving, but remains at home to await his return. Rather than leave him or confront him with the error of his ways, Wells' character allows her husband the time, however much he needs, to come to the conclusion himself that his actions are immoral.

However, a song section that occurs twice in "Unloved, Unwanted" makes an oblique reference to the immorality of the husband's extramarital affair, thereby breaking slightly from the expectedly demure character displayed by the narrator: she asks her husband, "Are you contented / With kisses that you steal?" The momentary slip in the façade of dutiful wife that this lyric conveys, along with its reference to the physical aspect of a romantic entanglement, is the only hint in this song of both the narrator's potential anger and Wells' past as a proto-feminist in her early career.¹⁰⁶ It is also an acceptable reference to physical love for a woman to include in her music in 1962, for

¹⁰⁶ This references Wells' first hit, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" (1952).

two reasons. The first is that, in spite of its lack of a common euphemism, a reference to “kisses” is a very mild way to mention a physical romance. The second is that the romance the narrator addresses is not her own. This distance from the actions involved in a romantic relationship makes it less scandalous for a country audience in the early 1960s.

On its musical surface, “Unloved, Unwanted” is a true country lament for lost love and solidly representative of typical country music sounds at the time of its release. It features a four-measure introduction followed by song sections of strictly eight measures each, all containing seven measures of Wells’ voice followed by one measure of instrumental transition to the next song section.¹⁰⁷ The rhythm section of the accompaniment, comprising resonator guitar, double bass, and a subtle drum line, moves the song steadily along in 4/4, not even slowing down in its approach to the final cadence. The only part of the entire song that falls outside a four-beat, four- or eight-measure structure is the three-beat anacrusis to the introductory instrumental section. Other instruments included in “Unloved, Unwanted” are piano, lap steel guitar, and fiddles. The consistent use of backup vocals throughout the song provides the audience a landmark for the song’s chronological context. This common device from pop infiltrated country music through the prominence of the so-called Nashville Sound.¹⁰⁸ While Wells did not specifically participate in the promotion of that kind of country sound, as she began her career before producers and record executives tried to remove the rough edges from

¹⁰⁷ Instrumental introductions in country music and other popular music genres are commonly referred to as “intros.” In country music in particular, the intro also sometimes features a spoken-word section. Liggetts, *The Complete Handbook of Songwriting*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Joli Kathleen Jensen, “Creating the Nashville Sound: A Case Study in Commercial Culture Production” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1984), 78-79.

country music, its importance in the industry in the early 1960s meant that aspects of the Nashville Sound made their way into practically everyone's music.¹⁰⁹

As a continuation of its conventionality, "Unloved, Unwanted" employs a verse-chorus form, with very small tweaks for interest. It begins with an instrumental intro leading to an opening chorus that features the song's title as its first line. The following section is also most accurately labeled as a chorus. It uses the same melody as the first chorus does, but alters the lyrics of the second line from "I've never been so blue" to "is the life I live with you," for the only time in the song. Two verses follow the second chorus, which share a melody distinct from the previous sections, and each of which features distinct lyrics. However, after a verse asserting the narrator's place in her husband's life with the lyrics "I have your name / I wear your ring," the second verse contains a very slight melodic alteration while the lyrics turn outward. Wells' narrator addresses the husband and discusses his relationship with the "other woman," saying, "Are you contented / With kisses that you steal?" These last two lines in the verse utilize more of the eight measures assigned to the song section than in any previous section, and are sung in a higher tessitura than much of the rest of the song. A repetition of the chorus in its original form follows the second verse. The song concludes with an unaltered repeat of both the second verse and the chorus.

Unexpectedly, the lengthening of the lyrical phrase and use of a higher tessitura in the second verse of "Unloved, Unwanted" reveals that the narrator feels some emotion beyond the sadness conveyed by the generally lower-pitched melody in the rest of the song. Further, upward movements in the accompaniment for Wells' vocal lines only lead

¹⁰⁹ Jensen, "Creating the Nashville Sound," 79-80.

into the verses. Especially in the second verse, Wells sounds very nearly angry as she sings the higher-pitched melody supporting lyrics about the “other woman.” The choruses, on the other hand, utilize noticeable downward movements. After the second line of each chorus, usually “I’ve never been so blue,” the backup vocals emphasize the sadness associated with the lyric by descending stepwise on an “oo” syllable. The last line of each chorus is lowest in tessitura, and further emphasized by the backup singers’ repetition of the full line during the section’s transitional eighth measure. Not only does this way of ending the chorus show that the narrator feels heartbroken at her husband’s betrayal, it also reveals her stubbornness. The lyrics in the second half of the chorus are, “I know that I should leave / But I don’t want to.” The copycat backup vocals of “I don’t want to” confirm the narrator’s unwillingness to abandon hope, in spite of her broken heart.

Wells’ song is remarkable for its time in one more noticeable way: a mixed-gender pair of songwriters composed it. However, while women were not prominent enough in any aspect of the country music industry for a female composer to be commonplace in 1962, Wells was not alone as an early female country star who performed music written or co-written by a woman. For example, Loretta Lynn is particularly famous for writing her own music as the prominence of country women started to grow, but she also chose songs written by both men and women to add to her repertoire.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ For example, Lynn herself wrote “Fist City” (1968), while “Wine, Women and Song” (1964) was written by a woman and “You’ve Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)” (1968) was written by a man.

In “Before He Cheats,” the 2006 release that became a new standard for women’s reactions to men’s infidelity in country music in the years since, Carrie Underwood sings about carrying out a plan to destroy a man’s truck while he actively cheats on her in a bar. The narrator appears much more empowered than the woman in Wells’ song, at least on the surface. Fifty years prior to this song’s release, around the time “Unloved, Unwanted” was popular, a (decent) woman simply did not behave the way the woman in “Before He Cheats” does.

In Underwood’s song, the man’s financial burden associated with repairing the truck is accompanied by an emotional wound to heal. The truck’s destruction offers the narrator both literal and metaphorical revenge; the “souped-up four-wheel drive” pickup represents the cheater’s manhood, and by destroying it she also intends to destroy his masculinity and his sense of self.¹¹¹ The form of revenge outlined in “Before He Cheats” requires planning, and Underwood’s narrator must bring the tools of destruction with her. The choruses indicate the need for at least keys, a knife, and a baseball bat to teach the man his lesson. Furthermore, Underwood’s hit marks a turning point in hit cheating songs. The reaction of the woman in the song to her partner’s infidelity became a new landmark for women in country music, in part due to the song’s enormous commercial success and continuing relevance. “Before He Cheats” showed women in country audiences, and the men attached to the women in the audience, that cheating begets real

¹¹¹ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 2.

consequences, and should not be taken lightly or brushed off by anyone involved in it or affected by it.¹¹²

And yet, the angry girlfriend in “Before He Cheats” does not directly confront her philandering boyfriend at all during the course of the song, in spite of making her feelings about his actions quite clear to both the man and the audience. Underwood’s character never actually sees the man; he is “*probably* dabbing on three dollars’ worth of that bathroom Polo,” but she never knows for sure.¹¹³ This remnant of Wells’ long-ago passivity indicates that the woman in “Before He Cheats” possesses neither complete control of the situation nor total command of her own feelings. The passive element in this song reveals that the narrator is not so empowered after all. Nevertheless, the subject matter in the song proves that women are more than capable of taking action against their men’s misbehavior, and that society as a whole finds it much more acceptable to do so than it did in the past. Women are no longer the weaker sex, destined to wait at home for their wandering male partners. Rather, they are less often portrayed as married and more frequently seen as fully able to destroy a man’s property by their own hands when they think he deserves it. “Before He Cheats” tells the world that, as far as country music is concerned, if a man treats a woman poorly, he will receive poor treatment in return.¹¹⁴

“Before He Cheats” is both typical of Underwood’s style and a stand-out in her repertoire. Underwood’s collection of singles since winning *American Idol* in 2005

¹¹² This is not unlike older songs that tell the tales of the consequences suffered by unfaithful women, among them Tanya Tucker’s 1973 hit, “Blood Red and Goin’ Down.”

¹¹³ Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ Others of Underwood’s songs that indicate men deserve punishment for causing harm to women include “Blown Away” (2012) and “Two Black Cadillacs” (2012).

generally contains two types of songs: inspiring ballads about the struggles of everyday life and feisty numbers about men misbehaving in different ways.¹¹⁵ Some of her repertory contains exceptions and instances of overlap, but “Before He Cheats” fits squarely into the second category.¹¹⁶ One of only two songs by the prolific Underwood to fit the criteria for this study, it is her only major hit cheating song through 2015 from a first-person perspective. This fits with her generally wholesome image, which includes relatively few songs wherein she portrays the “bad girl,” or honky-tonk angel, compared with some other female country performers.¹¹⁷

In spite of the forty-four years between their debuts, “Before He Cheats” shares a few musical similarities with “Unloved, Unwanted,” such as the use of a typical 4/4 time signature and fairly strict adherence to eight-measure song sections. As Wells’ does, Underwood’s song begins with an anacrusis leading into a four-bar instrumental introduction, although it is quicker than the one that opens “Unloved, Unwanted.” While Wells’ song has a faster tempo than Underwood’s, “Before He Cheats” feels as though it moves faster, due in part to the considerably larger number of words in Underwood’s song, and in part to the style of accompaniment it uses. “Before He Cheats” features many classic country sounds, provided by piano, acoustic guitar, pedal steel guitar, and fiddle. Even the style of the backup vocals is reminiscent of those in Wells’ much earlier song. However, Underwood’s song features some noticeable modern updates. It includes

¹¹⁵ For an example of the former category, see Underwood’s 2015 hit “Smoke Break.”

¹¹⁶ As an example of an exception, Underwood had a hit with a song in which the female narrator misbehaves on a grand scale: “Last Name” (2007).

¹¹⁷ This artist’s “bad girl” songs, all made more wholesome by some mitigating factor, include “Before He Cheats” (2006), “Last Name” (2007), “Smoke Break” (2015), and her 2014 duet with Miranda Lambert “Somethin’ Bad,” 2014.

electric guitar, it uses electric bass instead of double bass, and it features drums used in more elaborate ways than in previous decades. These updates are evidence of the increasing influence of rock-n-roll on country music.

Underwood's "Before He Cheats" also shares with Wells' "Unloved, Unwanted" the use of a modified verse-chorus form, although the ways the composers modified these forms differ greatly. Underwood's song begins with a verse, while Wells' begins with two choruses. A chorus follows the initial verse of "Before He Cheats," succeeded by another verse and another chorus. At this point, the song's form further diverges from that of Wells' earlier hit by including a bridge before the final chorus.¹¹⁸ A tag that repeats the refrain, "maybe next time he'll think before he cheats," and then the title alone finishes the song.¹¹⁹ Both bridges and tags were less common in the country music of the 1960s than in that of the 2000s, although they did occur.¹²⁰ The use of a bridge, in particular, in a country song demonstrates the overlap of pop and country sounds and traditions. The crossover success of "Before He Cheats" also helps to convey the very real intermixing of country with other musical genres. A final way that the form of "Before He Cheats" deviates from standards set by traditional country music is through its toying with the conventional use of a measure of vocal rest between song sections. In

¹¹⁸ A bridge is an optional song section that does not recur and which contains unique lyrics and melody. It commonly serves as a climax for the song and offers both melodic and lyrical contrast, often including an unexpected detail. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms," 45; Braheny, *The Craft and Business of Song Writing*, 68.

¹¹⁹ A tag is a vocal section that elaborates on the final song section in order to conclude a song. It frequently includes a repetition of the last line or two of lyrics from the chorus, sometimes sung to a slightly different melody. A refrain is generally one or two lines of text, and nearly always contains the song's title. It recurs several times throughout a song, typically contained in at least the chorus, but almost never in the bridge. The refrain's melody is memorable and usually unchanging. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms," 44-45; Braheny, *The Craft and Business of Song Writing*, 67.

¹²⁰ For example, some of Loretta Lynn's cheating songs from the late 1960s make use of tags, including "Happy Birthday" (1964), "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" (1966), and "Fist City" (1968).

much of country music, listeners learn to expect a bit of space at the ends of vocal sections to provide for an instrumental transition between the types of sections. Both Wells' song and Underwood's do this, and it typically manifests itself in at least part of the final measure of each song section.

However, rather than using this compositional device to create a straightforward country song, "Before He Cheats" uses it to play with the audience's expectations and to reflect the narrator's strong feeling that her partner chose the wrong woman to cheat on. Most of this song's sections contain these transitional beats in a normative eight-measure phrase, with a few exceptions. First, one extra measure of purely instrumental music appears between the first chorus and the second verse. This extra bit of vocal rest creates a *nine*-measure phrase and adds an early element of instability to the song's structure and its emotional effect. The second verse also contributes to a feeling of uncertainty through Underwood's elongating of the last word of the third line so that it overlaps into the next measure, thereby postponing the occurrence of the final line, another "oh, and he don't know." Underwood also elongates the final word of the verse, leading directly into the chorus and entirely eliminating the instrumental transition from this eight-bar phrase. After these two fluctuations, the song returns to a more typical pattern of transition material in the last measure of the eight-bar song sections until it reaches the final chorus and its tag. Instead of the few beats of voiceless music found at the end of every previous chorus, the last repetition transitions directly into the tag, emphasizing the importance of the refrain's message. Overall, the way "Before He Cheats" plays with this particular convention of country songwriting shows that typical country song forms cannot contain or restrain the woman's anger as expressed in the song's lyrics.

“Before He Cheats” also employs several novel lyrical and musical devices that together cause it to stand out against both the music around it and the music that precedes it. For example, each of the first three lines of both verses begins with the same two words, “right now,” after which Underwood’s character speculates as to the activities inside the bar outside of which she stands. This particular construction of lyrics makes “Before He Cheats” more memorable and makes its lyrics easier to recall. Additionally, the accompaniment of the verses features a piano part reminiscent of the honky-tonks of yesteryear as a form of aural support for the scene imagined by the narrator. Among other instrumental emphases, the first verse contains a short wiggle from the fiddle after the words, “and she’s probably gettin’ frisky.” Each chorus ramps up the volume from the previous song section to provide raucous accompaniment to Underwood’s character listing the vandalism she performed by including every member of the accompaniment. The prominent drum part offers the audience an artistic interpretation of the sounds made by the destructive actions the narrator describes. In contrast, a few small sections of dangerously soft music immediately precede points of high impact and high emotion, such as at the end of the first verse and the end of the bridge.

Interestingly, “Unloved, Unwanted” and “Before He Cheats” share a resignation on the part of the woman to the idea that at least some men cannot help but stray from monogamous relationships, although their presentations differ. Wells offers the perspective that the best option available to a jilted wife is to wait for her husband to see the error of his ways and return to her loving arms. This contrasts with Underwood’s assertion in the bridge section of “Before He Cheats” that “next time that he cheats / you know it won’t be on me,” which, while still hinting at the inevitability of repeated

infidelity, shows that a woman no longer needs to stand by a man as he cheats. Underwood's narrator displays a more modern anger towards her boyfriend's infidelity than Wells' character does towards her husband's. The passivity and inaction of "Unloved, Unwanted" in the early 1960s become the passive aggression of "Before He Cheats" in the 2000s, and in the latter song the blame for both the infidelity and the consequences wrought by the narrator's hand rest solely on the man's shoulders. While Underwood's method of displaying her anger is particularly memorable, the lack of a direct confrontation with the cheater qualifies her character's form of retaliation as passive. Comparing Wells and Underwood's songs proves that a passive approach to infidelity perpetrated by a man did not totally disappear over time; it simply mutated.

Underwood's use of nontraditional sounds and structures in her country music, the assertive persona she portrays in this song, and the crossover success of "Before He Cheats" all demonstrate progress on the part of the country music industry when it comes to women's standing. Rock-influenced country music before the 2000s mainly belonged to men; confidence in accomplishing a goal was most frequently associated with men wooing women; pop-influenced sounds from a new female singer might impede her progress towards country stardom. Many factors contribute to Underwood's original and ongoing success as a country singer, among them her win on *American Idol*, her powerful voice and wide vocal range, and her careful balancing act between traditional country and pop and rock influences. "Before He Cheats" helped to establish Underwood as the well-rounded powerhouse performer the industry and audiences know her as today by combining traditional country musical aspects, such as the lyrical trope of infidelity and

the use of pedal steel guitar, with less typical features, such as portraying an extreme reaction to cheating and toying with phrase structures.

Kitty Wells' "Unloved, Unwanted" and Carrie Underwood's "Before He Cheats," despite being a very small sampling of the thirty-three songs in which a narrator's partner cheated on her, show progress in the way that women in country music, both as lyrical characters and as performers, deal with infidelity in monogamous relationships. This reflects the progress made in general society with regard to women's standing in romantic entanglements. Although the old country trope of a man with a wandering eye remains as evocative as ever, changes in gender relations in the United States and in country music culture led to and reflect changes in the way female narrators react to a partner's cheating.

FEMALE CHEATERS: CONTRASTING PRESENTATIONS

Four duets and five singles by solo performing acts are the only songs in this study which feature a female cheater in the lyrics.¹²¹ In all but two of these nine songs, both women and men cheat on their partners. Either their partners in the illicit affairs also cheat on someone or, as a later section of this thesis addresses further, they react to their partners' infidelity with their own. This section focuses on the division between women who cheat on their partners with a married man and those who cheat with one or more unmarried men. An outline of the four duets featuring unfaithful female partners precedes a comparison of the only two women's hit cheating songs in this study in which a married woman cheats, unprompted, with an unmarried man.

¹²¹ Table 3 on page 40 features the full list of songs with female cheaters.

Women in Dual-Cheater Duets

The long history of collaboration in country music, not only between songwriters, but also between performers, is reflected in this study in six examples in the form of duets.¹²² One of the duets stands out as the only duet in the study between two women, while mixed-gender pairs perform the remaining five. The characters represented in these five pairings are invariably cheating men and their mistresses, most of whom are also married or previously committed. This fits with the idea of a male-female duet as a song about romantic relationships, successful or otherwise, the usual topic for such collaborations.¹²³

Table 6.

Duets About Cheating		
Year	Song Title	Performing Artists
1962	"Willingly"	Willie Nelson feat. Shirley Collie
1964	"Love Is No Excuse"	Dottie West and Jim Reeves
1965	"Yes, Mr. Peters"	Roy Drusky and Priscilla Mitchell
1971	"After the Fire Is Gone"	Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty
1993	"Does He Love You"	Reba McEntire with Linda Davis
1997	"In Another's Eyes"	Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood

In all six of the duets in this study, one of the singers plays the role of the “other woman” and the immorality of an illicit relationship is addressed at least indirectly. No duets that fit all of the criteria for inclusion in my corpus of songs discuss cheating from

¹²² Table 6 on page 62 outlines the full list of duets.

¹²³ Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, rev. ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985), 286.

the perspectives of a wife and her own husband.¹²⁴ While a duet between a couple who are married to each other discussing past cheating by one or both of them sounds on paper like an excellent way to portray real life in country music, this type of song is notably absent from the repertoire. Perhaps it is *too* real, too “authentic,” even for country. Additionally, unlike many songs performed by individual acts, the question of morality looms over the affair in every duet, and each takes its own view of the matter. However, the participants all appear content to maintain their positions in their relationship(s), in spite of any moral issues they might have with their romantic entanglements. Further, the reluctance to change the status quo of the extramarital affairs in these songs neither diminishes nor increases over time, in spite of social changes that might affect such an attitude. There is a paradoxical loyalty to these extramarital affairs that overrides the issue of their morality. Loyalty to long-term partners is important in country music, so even when a person is involved in more than one relationship, that loyalty usually wins out in each relationship.

Based on the evidence provided by this study, the popularity of male-female duets about cheating declined over time. Three of the male-female duets are from the 1960s, one is from the 1970s, and one is from the 1990s. The last of these, performed by Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood, references the older tradition of cheating duets.¹²⁵ However, the song’s ambiguity about whether the lovers are married to or merely

¹²⁴ At least one duet discusses *future* cheating from the perspective of the husband and wife together. “Jackson,” released in 1967 and number forty-eight out of fifty on the year-end country songs chart the same year, features a husband and wife making plans to find love elsewhere now that the flame between them is gone.

¹²⁵ Cathy A. Bringham, “Constructing and Internalizing Countriness: Authenticity and Fan Diversity in Country Music Culture” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2002), 39.

involved with other people lends it a sense of modernity. The previous male-female duets make the lovers' marital status much clearer. Of the six total duets in this study, only the woman in "Yes, Mr. Peters" (1965) and the woman performed by Linda Davis in "Does He Love You" (1993) do not appear to be romantically involved with more than one man. Therefore, this section omits those two songs, as its intent is to discuss unfaithful women.

A brief discussion of each of the four duets featuring female cheaters follows in order to provide a background of more stereotypical women cheaters in country music for contrast against later discussions, beginning with Willie Nelson and Shirley Collie's "Willingly" (1962). Chronologically the earliest duet to qualify for this study, it describes a pair who love each other, but "to someone else [they] both belong." They address the idea that they knew they ought to refrain from engaging in a romantic relationship with each other, with one partner saying "I fell [in love] although I knew" while the other responds with "I knew the same as you" that "it was wrong," and that they must wait "until our love can be." Yet they both vow in the song's chorus to "wait willingly." On its surface, "Willingly" is a simple and sweet love song, and without the section of lyrics that indicates the illicit status of the lovers' affair it loses what makes its lyrics most notable. The accompanying ensemble for Nelson and Collie on the studio recording is standard and includes double bass, drums, acoustic guitar, lap steel guitar, and piano. The steel guitar and piano do not play at the same time, except in the concluding chords in the final measure.

"Willingly" paradoxically follows the structural norms of the early 1960s using song sections whose classifications are murky. The song's melodic structure features a straightforward series of eight-measure sections, with the exception of a four-bar

introduction and a four-bar instrumental break near the end of the song. However, the groups of eight bars do not fit the definitions of “verse,” “chorus,” and “bridge” perfectly, making it difficult to ascribe section names to each of them. What appears to be a verse only occurs twice in eight vocal segments, and only in the first half of the song. What appears to be a chorus features unique lyrics in its first of four occurrences. And what appears to be a bridge occurs twice, defying the conventional definition of such a section. With these qualifications in mind, I describe the form of “Willingly” as an intro followed by a verse, an altered chorus, and another verse. Next comes the unaltered chorus and a bridge, then another chorus and a short instrumental break. The song ends with a repetition of the bridge and chorus.

Overall, “Willingly” is emblematic of its time and serves as a useful backdrop for the music that follows. It features what many now think of as classic country instrumentation. The lyrics approach the subject matter with subtlety, without a hint of sexuality in the romantic love described. And, in spite of Collie’s greater experience in the industry than Nelson’s at the time they recorded the song, his name leads the credits and this duet now appears to pair a well-known male singer with a lesser known female singer, as many duets of the time did. Even the legendary Loretta Lynn recorded a few such duets in her early career; before she and Conway Twitty joined forces to become a powerhouse duet act, Lynn worked with Ernest Tubb.¹²⁶

The next duet in this study, Dottie West and Jim Reeves’ “Love Is No Excuse” (1964), focuses squarely on the immoral aspect of the narrators’ relationship with each other. As in Nelson and Collie’s “Willingly,” West and Reeves’ song contains no overt

¹²⁶ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 120.

discussion of a sexual aspect in the romance. However, West and Reeves' song does reference sexuality obliquely in the lyric, "Our love for each other looks good in the night." Reeves sings this particular line alone, falling well within the expected gender roles for country singers of the time, but West joins him in harmony for the next line: "But our love can never see the light of day." Interestingly, "Love Is No Excuse" does not conclusively state whether or not the extramarital affair continues after the song, in spite of the phrasing changing from "love is no excuse for what *we're doing*" in the opening line to "love is no excuse for what *we've done*" at the end of the song.

In a sound that is mostly typical for the early 1960s, West and Reeves' song utilizes the smooth, pop-leaning Nashville Sound in its accompaniment, including orchestral strings and a veritable choir of backup vocalists.¹²⁷ The track also includes a mallet percussion instrument, likely marimba, and a rhythm section composed of piano, drums, and double bass; in a break with country conventions, guitar is notably absent. The rhythm section keeps the music moving along in quick four-measure phrases throughout the song's straightforward form, with four such phrases occurring within each vocal song section. The first three out of four total sections all contain different lyrics, while the final section strictly repeats the lyrics of the third. Only the second section has a different melody from the others. Therefore, the larger form of "Love Is No Excuse" is a four-bar intro; a verse, a vocal bridge, and another verse of sixteen measures each; an eight-bar instrumental bridge and a final repeat of the second verse, with no added measures for the ending. With a few exceptions, the song's instrumentation and formal

¹²⁷ Jensen, "Creating the Nashville Sound," 78-79.

structure are common enough to verge on boring. But these simple building blocks support lyrics that move forward slightly in the progression of women's country music.

Although "Love Is No Excuse" makes a small social progression from the conservatism heard in "Willingly" as a song featuring a female singer that makes a sly reference to sex, it still stands solidly in the country music of the early 1960s. The woman in the song does not reference the sexual aspect of their relationship, it leans heavily on the issue of immorality in extramarital affairs, and it displays the smooth pop influence evident in the Nashville Sound.¹²⁸ While the influences from pop music never really leave country music, they do evolve over time, and West and Reeves' "Love Is No Excuse" appeared on *Billboard's* year-end country songs chart on the cusp of significant changes in the sounds of country music, as well as changes in the genre's lyrical content.

In a marked change from the previously discussed duets, Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty's 1971 hit, "After the Fire Is Gone," very clearly blames the main characters' infidelity on their respective spouses, who, as C.R. Chandler, et al., phrase it, "had withdrawn love, sex or both, thus 'forcing' their partners to seek satisfaction elsewhere."¹²⁹ Of the male-female duets in this study, only "After the Fire Is Gone" indicates that the behavior of the narrators' respective partners contributed to their seeking out a lover. The choruses repeat the idea that "love is where you find it / When you find no love at home." And choice lyrics sung by Lynn in the verses reinforce that idea, such as "the fire's gone out at home," from the first verse, and "sweet words of love you remember / That the one at home forgot," from the second verse. "After the Fire Is

¹²⁸ Jensen, "Creating the Nashville Sound," 78-79.

¹²⁹ Chandler, et al., "Cheaters Sometimes Win," 141.

Gone” explicitly mentions the immorality of the affair only once, in a line sung by Lynn in the first verse, “We know it’s wrong for us to meet,” making it the least direct of the early duets on the subject. The song does not mention the potential for the lovers’ relationship to cause emotional pain for their spouses at all, in a significant shift from the duets previously addressed.

While the initial release of “After the Fire Is Gone” lists Lynn and Twitty as equal partners in an additional point of social progress, Lynn actually plays a notably larger role in the vocal aspect of the song. Not only does she sing more lines than Twitty does, but her lyrics also reveal more than his do. Of the lyric examples quoted above, the two performers sing only the first one, “love is where you find it / When you find no love at home,” together. The character Lynn plays in this song offers the most discussion of the lovers’ physical relationship and of what they leave behind when they meet. Twitty’s character alone, on the other hand, mentions alcohol as part of why he cannot resist the temptation of meeting his lover. So while Lynn breaks the taboo of women discussing sexual relationships, she does *not* also break the taboo of women talking about drinking. In the early 1970s, male singers still held a monopoly on that topic.¹³⁰

Musically speaking, “After the Fire Is Gone” is very subtly groundbreaking for the time period. It adheres to country’s structural norms through its use of 4/4 meter and vocal segments of eight-measure choruses alternating with sixteen-measure verses. The last four measures of each vocal section contain a refrain performed by Lynn and Twitty in harmony, the lyrics of which are “and there’s nothing cold as ashes / After the fire is

¹³⁰ Lynn’s first single, “I’m a Honky Tonk Girl” (1960), talks about drinking, but did so in the context of the shame assigned to a woman living the honky-tonk lifestyle, rather than as part of women’s shared life experiences.

gone.” The mostly conventional overall form of the song is chorus, verse, chorus, four-bar instrumental bridge, verse, and chorus. Yet one particular aspect of the song’s structure deviates from expectations for a song from 1971. After each eight- or sixteen-measure vocal section and the four-measure bridge, one bar of instrumental music occurs, offering the only aspect of the song that throws it off from a more typical square, four-measure structure throughout. These individual measures without vocals serve as transitional music for each section. As discussed previously, short breaks from the vocal parts are commonly used in country music, but they are typically included *within* an eight- or sixteen-bar phrase or song section. However, the placement of these measures of vocal rest in “After the Fire Is Gone” creates nine-measure choruses and seventeen-measure verses, which is highly unusual. Even the four-measure instrumental bridge is actually five bars long. While “After the Fire Is Gone” demonstrates the consistency of rhythm and meter that is so important to country music, its particular patterns in implementing this aspect of the song are contradictory to tradition.

“After the Fire Is Gone” makes strides forward from the two previously discussed duets in several ways. First, it utilizes more honest and revealing lyrics than past duets do. For example, Lynn openly refers to the physical romance associated with the extramarital affair showcased in the song. While perhaps unsurprising that the always-honest Lynn is among the early women who reference sex in their country songs, “After the Fire Is Gone” is notable as the earliest hit cheating duet to contain suggestive lyrics performed by the female singer. Additionally, while it briefly acknowledges the immorality of the narrators’ extramarital affair, “After the Fire Is Gone” gives reasons for their immoral actions by blaming their spouses and the quality of their marriages.

Chronologically speaking, it is not only the first duet but also the first song in this study that justifies continued infidelity in an attempt to make the behavior more morally acceptable. It also stands out among the duets as the only one to mention alcohol as part of the lovers' liaisons, through Twitty's line, "The bottle is almost empty."

Another step forward taken by this song comes from its change in the approach to musical phrasing. In the previously outlined male-female duets, the measure of instrumental music between lines and/or sections is part of the structure of the section. This means that in "Willingly" and "Love Is No Excuse," a four-bar segment of lyrics actually only takes three measures to sing, while the fourth serves as a break before the next vocal segment begins. "After the Fire Is Gone" moves that measure of vocal rest outside of the vocal section, thereby altering the structure of the song so that its total measures are not easily divisible by four. While this might not appear remarkable in today's music, the steady pattern of fours in both meter and phrasing was a signature of country music throughout the 1960s.¹³¹

Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood's 1997 hit, "In Another's Eyes," appeared on a *Billboard* year-end country songs chart twenty-six years after the previous mixed-gender duet in this study did so and focuses primarily on the emotions felt by a pair of lovers in an illicit relationship. According to the lyrics, the narrators each see the other when looking at their primary partners. They express worry over the possible discovery of their relationship, and insinuate an unwillingness to change the status quo. Near the end of the song, the lovers hint that their other relationships suffer more than they originally imagined, through their shared lyrics, "I see a sinking soul trying desperately /

¹³¹ Horn, "'Keepin' It Country,'" 462-463.

To turn the tide before it dies.” The sense of remorse for their actions throughout the song shows that the narrators realize the immorality of their affair and the potential pain for their partners. The acknowledgement of wrongdoing and simultaneous unwillingness to correct it ties these four male-female duets together, across the decades from 1962 to 1997.

The music of “In Another’s Eyes” is more modern than that of its predecessors. While it utilizes the typical 4/4 meter of country music, only some of it adheres to the tradition of country song sections occurring in multiples of four-bar phrases. The song begins with a four-measure introduction and two eight-measure verses. But the choruses add two measures to create a ten-bar section. After the first chorus, another eight-bar verse occurs, followed by a five-measure bridge that overlaps slightly with the following chorus. This final chorus is emphasized through the use of a four-bar tag, the last measure of which includes only the final instrumental chord.

In contrast to the song’s use of altered metrical structures, “In Another’s Eyes” utilizes many of the same instruments as the older duets, as the expectation of their use in country music continues through today as part of the tradition. Brooks and Yearwood’s song uses the classic country rhythm section of acoustic guitar, drums, and bass, but with the modern inclusion of an electric bass rather than a double bass. Although the song features orchestral strings reminiscent of the Nashville Sound in the choruses and bridge, it does not contain backup vocals, unlike all three of the older duets already discussed. “In Another’s Eyes” features both pedal steel guitar and the more rock-influenced electric guitar. Finally, an electric organ makes a brief appearance.

The instruments are introduced into the song as part of the slow build to the climax at the beginning of the final chorus. In the first verse, Brooks sings alone with only a piano for accompaniment. The rhythm section and pedal steel join in the next verse, sung only by Yearwood. The strings enter for the first time in the chorus that immediately follows, sung mostly in harmony with one line by Brooks alone. Organ only appears in the final verse, wherein Brooks and Yearwood split the vocal part equally. After “In Another’s Eyes” reaches its climax in volume and emotion at the end of the bridge and the beginning of the final chorus, both of which feature the pair of singers in harmony, the instruments begin to pull back, dropping out almost entirely by the last three repetitions of the song’s title that begin at the end of the last chorus. In fact, after alternating solo utterances of the lyric, Brooks and Yearwood perform the final iteration of “in another’s eyes” in *a capella* harmony, before most of the instruments enter for a final, gentle chord to end the song.

The opening calm of “In Another’s Eyes” leads to a powerful culmination of swirling emotions that the fictional lovers ultimately subdue, representing the real emotions felt by people involved in extramarital affairs. While the three previous duets in this group utilize their lyrics to convey the feelings of the participants of extramarital affairs, Brooks and Yearwood take it a step further in their use of the music itself as an additional emotive tool. Interestingly, this song places less emphasis on the physical nature of the lovers’ relationship than “After the Fire Is Gone” does, in spite of the many years and loosened taboos between them. The only mentions of it are when Brooks tells his lover that his original partner believes “I’d never cheat,” and when Yearwood relates euphemistically that her partner likewise believes that she will “never fall or even

compromise.” Brooks and Yearwood’s song makes progress in that it musically represents the late 1990s and that it emphasizes the emotions of those who cheat equally with their concern for the emotions of the people they cheat on. But “In Another’s Eyes” also relies on the old tradition of sanitizing the physical content of extramarital affairs for the country audience.

This group of male-female duets represents and reflects a tradition of continuity and self-reference in country music mixed with a subtle note of progress. While the popularity of duets specifically addressing infidelity diminished over time, mixed gender duets do continue to appear on *Billboard* year-end country songs charts. For the country audience, the appeal of a loving couple singing together does not lessen with time. Although modernity makes itself known in small ways, such as whether the couples indicate their marital status in the songs, mixed gender duets as a category of country music remain unchanged in many aspects.

When a Woman’s Infidelity Ends

The two songs featuring solo female cheaters stand out as unique amongst the songs in this study: Tanya Tucker’s 1973 hit, “Blood Red and Goin’ Down,” and The Judds’ 1989 hit, “Change of Heart.” These two songs feature the ends of the illicit relationships that unfaithful women sought out for their own enjoyment. In other words, the female cheaters neither participate in a dual-cheater relationship nor choose cheating as a form of revenge against an unfaithful man. This uniting factor does not provide many more similarities between the two songs. Differences include the reactions of the men on whom the women cheated, whether the unfaithful woman feels remorseful, the

performers and songwriters themselves, the sounds of the songs, and the chronological and social contexts in which the songs debuted.

Tanya Tucker's "Blood Red and Goin' Down" tells the story of a cuckolded husband hunting down his unapologetic wife and her lover and taking murderous revenge, all through the eyes of the ten-year-old daughter of the married pair. Tucker was not quite fifteen years old herself when she released this song, so the emphasis on the youth of the narrator was important for country audiences' ability to reconcile a violent subject with such a young performer.¹³² One important factor in making this song unique is that the cheating woman apparently feels no remorse for her actions. In fact, the narrator quotes her father as saying, "Mama's always lookin' for a lover." The lyrics do not say outright that the man in the story murdered his wife and her lover. Rather, it says he "left them both soaking up the sawdust on the floor" of the bar in which he found them. This, in combination with the "blood red" sun referenced in the title and refrain, makes the outcome of the man's search for his cheating wife quite clear without explicit mention of it.

The idea of murdering an unfaithful woman is not new in country music, but such tales are commonly told by men, and/or from the perspective of a person not specifically tied to the couple or lovers in question.¹³³ Therefore, this song's use of a young female narrator makes it unusual within the entire genre of country music, not just in this study.

¹³² Tucker's next single, "Would You Lay With Me (In a Field of Stone)" (1973, caused some controversy because of this disconnect between Tucker's youth and the maturity of the lyrics. Nevertheless, it appeared at number thirteen out of fifty on *Billboard's* year-end country songs chart for 1974. The same disconnect happened a few decades later, when LeAnn Rimes hit the country scene at the same age Tucker began her own career. Laurence Leamer, *Three Chords and the Truth: Hope, Heartbreak, and Changing Fortunes in Nashville* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 224.

¹³³ Chandler, et al., "Cheaters Sometimes Win," 134.

However, this was a fairly typical approach in Tucker's early years as a country performer. She began her career in her early teens, and became popular through emphasizing the juxtaposition of her physical youth and vocal maturity. Her song selection during the early years of her career not only highlighted this to great effect, but also included tunes that went on to become quintessential examples of country music for audiences not traditionally associated with the genre.

In addition to the unique lyrical approach to cheating and Tucker's youth, "Blood Red and Goin' Down" is remarkable in its heavy use of contrast. Beyond the content of such contradictory lyrics as "some dude has come along and stole your mother / But you can't steal a willin' mind," the song also presents a series of musical contrasts. For instance, it utilizes a common country form by alternating verses and choruses without a vocal bridge section, but begins with a chorus rather than a verse. Therefore the structure marks the song as somewhat old-fashioned despite the overtly modern combination of singer and subject matter. The song opens with an instrumental intro, followed by two pairs of a chorus and a verse. Next comes a chorus followed immediately by an upward stepwise modulation, foreshadowing the lyrical climax to come, after an instrumental bridge, in the final verse and double chorus.¹³⁴

The choruses in "Blood Red and Goin' Down" provide further contrast in their remarkable brevity compared to the longer verses between them. Contained in only five measures of music, each of the first three choruses repeats the refrain, "that Georgia sun was blood red and goin' down," twice and ends with a measure of transitional

¹³⁴ This type of modulation is a common device used in popular music. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms," 48; Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver Through the Anthology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 116.

instrumental music.¹³⁵ A four-bar structure is more common for phrases in country music than five, as this song's verses make apparent. The verses are much longer than the choruses, using four lines of lyrics over four bars of music each, for a total of sixteen measures in each verse, to relate the song's narrative with detail and emphasis. In spite of opening with a chorus, "Blood Red and Goin' Down" prioritizes the verses, as the song is foremost a story.

The instrumentation of "Blood Red and Goin' Down" offers another musical contrast. A fairly standard rhythm section for country music at the time, composed of bass, piano, rhythm guitar, and drumset, supports the song's musical and harmonic structure.¹³⁶ "Blood Red and Goin' Down" also highlights traditional country instruments in its harmony and counterpoint: pedal steel guitar, harmonica, and a piano feature. But at the same time, the track is heavily produced with symphonic strings and backup vocals that provide harmonies throughout. This pop-influence aspect harkens back to the Nashville Sound of the 1960s. Yet the combination of traditional country and pop sounds does not lean far enough to the pop side to qualify this song as Countryopolitan, the pop-blend of the 1970s that emerged from the Nashville Sound.¹³⁷

Lastly, "Blood Red and Goin' Down" utilizes certain contrasts within its instrumentation to add emphasis, emotion, and imagery to the lyrics, a musical tool that

¹³⁵ The final two choruses omit the transitional measure of music, combining into one eight-bar section that ends with a ritardando, followed by a fermata on the final chord.

¹³⁶ The phrase "rhythm guitar" refers to an acoustic guitar played with a "slightly choked strumming style" for harmonic support and percussive emphasis, which makes it part of the rhythm section of a song's accompaniment. Many country singers play their own rhythm guitar accompaniment. Ross, "The Guitar in Country Music," 134.

¹³⁷ Brigham, "Constructing and Internalizing COUNTRYNESS," 41; Millard, *Country Music: 70 Years of America's Favorite Music*, 181.

was not commonly used in the decade or so before the song's debut. In the second verse, the first two lines are almost *a capella*, with Tucker's voice accompanied only by stark percussion and harmonica parts. The lyrics in that section describe the father and daughter as they walk through the streets of Augusta, Georgia, searching for the mother figure in their nuclear family. The "dusty teardrops" on the man's face and the "big steps he was takin'," along with the young girl "halfway runnin' to keep up," indicate to the audience that this is a lonely and desperate pair. The harmonica emphasizes their hopelessness with its iconic sound of the open road. In the third and final verse, the piano of the rhythm section comes to the forefront, as the narrator and her father search "in every barroom and honky-tonk as well" for her mother. In fact, the first phrase of lyrics in this verse is shortened by a full measure to feature the piano in its melodic capacity rather than its rhythmic role. This contrasting use of piano sounds like the live music one might hear at the honky-tonk the narrator's father ultimately finds his wife in, setting the listener firmly alongside the characters in the story just as the climactic moment occurs.

Released as a single fifteen years after Tucker's song, The Judds' "Change of Heart" contributes an unusual approach to cheating in country music because it presents the perspective of a woman who cheated on her partner of her own volition making the decision to end her affair(s) in an effort to save the relationship she formerly took for granted. Prior to the beginning of the song, the audience understands that the narrator's partner indicated his plans to leave. The narrator, as performed by Wynonna Judd, then sings about how she wronged him and asks for forgiveness, telling him, "Before you go I just want you to know / That I've had a change of heart." This song is believable regardless of the gender of the singer. Even though Naomi Judd, Wynonna's mother and

performing partner, composed it, “Change of Heart” feels as though a man wrote it, because it fits the mold of many men’s cheating songs in which they lament their misbehavior.¹³⁸

Much as Jennifer Nettles, nearly twenty years later, walked a mile in the shoes of the “other woman” for Sugarland’s hit “Stay,” Naomi Judd wrote “Change of Heart” from what feels like a cheating man’s point of view, thereby causing the song to bend country’s traditional gender roles. For female voices in country music, a cheating woman typically becomes involved in an extramarital affair with a married man or cheats in response to her partner’s prior infidelity. This thesis addresses both of these types of songs elsewhere. Country music’s history also contains songs performed by male artists about unfaithful women. But “Change of Heart” does not fit in any of these categories.

The lyrics of “Change of Heart” contain many phrases that sound like a reversal of what a woman might say to a man in a cheating song. Instead of accusing the male partner of clichés often found in such songs, in this tune, the woman confesses that she “was playing you for a fool,” that she “had my boss lie for me, to say I was working late,” and that “promises I made were just words I was sayin’.” After confessing her sins against her partner and acknowledging that he “knew all along,” she tells him that she realized “I was only cheatin’ me,” in a reversal of what a woman might say to her partner in a more stereotypical cheating song. For example, this study’s most prolific performer, Loretta Lynn, tells her husband in “Wine, Women and Song” (1966) that “you’ll see what you’ve done,” and in her later hit, “You’ve Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)” (1968), the narrator tells her husband, “I’ll bet your conscience hurts you constantly.” But

¹³⁸ Chandler, et al., “Cheaters Sometimes Win,” 139.

the narrator in “Change of Heart” turns these ideas around and indicates that her behavior bothers her own conscience, instead of having to hear from her partner that she ought to feel remorse.

In the second half of “Change of Heart,” the narrator tries to convince her partner to stay, and it sounds much like what male country artists sing when they address the women who leave them. The Judds’ narrator tells her partner, “I can be true to you” and “I’m beggin’ you please.” The lyrics differ slightly in this song’s two choruses to indicate which partner’s heart changes. The first one transitions between the confessional and the hope for amends by stating that the narrator has changed her mind about continuing to cheat on her partner. The second chorus asks the partner to change his mind about ending their relationship, altering the lyrics from “I’ve had a change of heart” to “please have a change of heart.”

“Change of Heart” features several extended and metrically fluid phrases throughout the song that contribute to the sense that it depicts a conversation between two partners, or possibly soon-to-be ex-partners. It opens with Wynonna Judd’s solo vocals and an acoustic guitar in a metrically freeform first verse. A second verse follows, with a stricter meter and fuller accompaniment. The first chorus features backup vocals for the first time in the song. In fact, those additional vocal harmonies only appear in choruses, emphasizing the verses as an individual’s personal plea to her partner. The first chorus is followed by an additional verse, the second and final chorus, and a closing tag that features both members of The Judds singing in harmony and *a capella*.

The sound of “Change of Heart” focuses very much on the vocal melody, rather than on the fairly sparse instrumentation. It features traditional country sounds of acoustic

and pedal steel guitars atop a rhythm section comprising drums, piano, and bass. While the instrumental accompaniment in “Change of Heart” does not purposefully create imagery to accompany the lyrics, as the instrumentation in “Blood Red and Goin’ Down” does, it nevertheless combines with the metrical ebb and flow of the vocal melody in a way that paints a picture for listeners. Between the spare instrumentation and the way the Judds toy with meter and phrasing, “Change of Heart” easily places its audience in the shoes of the narrator.

“Blood Red and Goin’ Down” and “Change of Heart” represent some of the earliest hit songs that turn the common country trope of cheating around in a conscious effort to do something that is different from the genre’s lyrical conventions. Such songs are slightly more common in recent years, as songwriters and performers continue to search for unique ways to approach standard country materials. Yet, at the same time, these songs stand apart from each other in spite of a tenuous thematic connection. This reflects the country industry’s highly American ideal of individualism as a virtue, in spite of that virtue not being encouraged among women.¹³⁹

THE “OTHER WOMAN”: WOMEN WHO PORTRAY A MISTRESS

A total of twelve songs in which the performer or one of the performers portrays the “other woman” qualify for this study. This group of songs includes five mixed-gender duets, one duet between two women,¹⁴⁰ and six performances by single performing acts.

¹³⁹ *The Encyclopedia of Women and Gender*, s.v. “The Feminist Movement.”

¹⁴⁰ The mixed-gender duets are Willie Nelson and Shirley Collie’s “Willingly” (1962), Dottie West and Jim Reeves’ “Love Is No Excuse” (1964), Roy Drusky and Priscilla Mitchell’s “Yes, Mr. Peters” (1965), Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty’s “After the Fire Is Gone” (1971), and Garth Brooks and Trisha

This section focuses on the performances by individual acts, as other sections of this thesis address the duets. The songs by one performing act each include Barbara Mandrell's "Married But Not to Each Other" (1977) and "(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right" (1979); Rosanne Cash's "The Way We Make a Broken Heart" (1987); Sugarland's "Stay" (2007); Sunny Sweeney's "From a Table Away" (2010); and Sara Evans' "My Heart Can't Tell You No" (2011).¹⁴¹

Table 7.

Songs From the Perspective of a Mistress		
Year	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)
1962	"Willingly"	Willie Nelson feat. Shirley Collie
1964	"Love Is No Excuse"	Dottie West and Jim Reeves
1965	"Yes, Mr. Peters"	Roy Drusky and Priscilla Mitchell
1971	"After the Fire Is Gone"	Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty
1977	"Married But Not To Each Other"	Barbara Mandrell
1979	"(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right"	Barbara Mandrell
1987	"The Way We Make a Broken Heart"	Rosanne Cash
1993	"Does He Love You"	Reba McEntire with Linda Davis
1997	"In Another's Eyes"	Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood
2008	"Stay"	Sugarland
2011	"From a Table Away"	Sunny Sweeney
2012	"My Heart Can't Tell You No"	Sara Evans

Yearwood's "In Another's Eyes" (1997). The women-only duet is Reba McEntire with Linda Davis, "Does He Love You" (1993).

¹⁴¹ Table 7 on page 81 contains the full list of songs from this perspective.

A brief introduction to each of these six songs from the perspective of the mistress follows, before delving more deeply into two of them in particular as representatives of the category. In the first of these songs, “Married But Not to Each Other” by Barbara Mandrell, the narrator talks about being in love with someone other than her husband, and neither she nor her lover wants to hurt their spouses. Mandrell’s “(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don’t Want to Be Right” and Rosanne Cash’s “The Way We Make a Broken Heart” both discuss the immorality of the illicit relationship, but both narrators indicate that they love their men too much to let that immorality stand in the way of their relationships.

The years after the new millennium present a more consolidated grouping of release dates for songs narrated by mistresses, beginning with a landmark in country music, Sugarland’s “Stay.” It emphasizes the emotional inconveniences of being the “other woman,” and during the course of the song the narrator develops the courage to leave the married man. “Stay” is a large part of the focus for the rest of this section. “From a Table Away” by Sunny Sweeney is similar in sentiment and approach to “Stay,” except the narrator does not indicate that she plans to leave the married man after seeing him in a restaurant with his wife, but merely hints at it. “From a Table Away” will also be addressed in greater detail below. The last song in this category, “My Heart Can’t Tell You No,” is Sara Evans’ version of a song originally released in 1988 by Rod Stewart. The change in the narrator’s gender in this particular cover performance reverses the meaning of the lyrics so that they place the blame for the affair on the man by indicating that the mistress absolutely cannot resist his appeal. She begs him to discontinue their immoral relationship, as she does not possess the power to do so herself.

Released as a single in September 2007 and appearing on *Billboard*'s year-end country songs chart in 2008, "Stay" was the first song recorded by Sugarland that the duo's lead singer, Jennifer Nettles, wrote entirely on her own, as mentioned in the introduction to this study.¹⁴² In an online interview with Lindsey Roznovsky of Country Music Television (CMT), Nettles indicated that she was never romantically involved with a married man herself, but that she wanted to write a song unlike anything that came before it. The interview contains the unusual admission that the song's story did not come from personal experience and is therefore not fully "authentic." But Nettles balances this by emphasizing her ties to country music's history and legends through discussing her source of inspiration: Reba McEntire's earliest major hit cheating song, "Whoever's in New England" (1986).¹⁴³

The lyrics in "Stay" reveal the woman's personal evolution; she starts out totally in love with a married man, then begins to doubt that she wants a part of this particular romantic situation, and finally tells him she is finished. She even indicates that this all happens as her "will is getting stronger," which points to personal growth as the reason she chooses to end the relationship. Unusually for a country song, "Stay" emphasizes women's sense of strength and independence over their sense of morality. The mistress in this song ends the relationship because she realizes she deserves more than waiting around for a man, more than half his heart.¹⁴⁴ Whether the relationship is wrong or right

¹⁴² Roznovsky, "The Story Behind Sugarland's 'Stay'." Sugarland, "Stay," 2006.

¹⁴³ In the case of cheating songs, some artists find it beneficial to distance themselves from the material, for the sake of creating and/or preserving an image that tends towards the wholesome or family-oriented.

¹⁴⁴ The attitude that women deserve all of their man's heart, love, and/or attention is fairly common in cheating songs. "Stay" is unique in that the "other woman" presents this attitude, rather than the man's original partner.

never comes up, unlike in past examples such as Barbara Mandrell's "(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right," wherein the immorality of the narrator's relationship with a married man is the central theme.

Upon first hearing "Stay," it is easy to believe that its perspective on cheating is totally unlike any other in country music, but this is not completely correct. According to the Roznovsky interview, when Nettles wrote the song in 2003, she "knew countless songs written from that viewpoint [of the woman who is cheated on] but none from the other two people involved. She says most people don't realize that even the person who is doing the cheating gets hurt."¹⁴⁵ Nettles' assertion is incorrect in one respect but right in another. This study's body of songs shows that women both before and after Nettles recorded songs from the perspective of the "other woman." Nettles' new approach to the idea of telling a cheating story through the mistress' eyes came from the empathy she infuses in the song.

"Stay" does not address the immorality of the forbidden affair, but rather focuses on the emotional toll it takes on the mistress, thereby humanizing her. Further, this remarkable song shows the "other woman" leaving the married man, something no other song from a similar character's perspective has the courage to do. Sunny Sweeney's song, "From a Table Away," released as a single after "Stay" first became popular, hints at the idea of ending the illicit romance, but only definitively indicates that the relationship will remain illicit. Both Sweeney's song and Sara Evans' hit "My Heart Can't Tell You No" also make an effort to humanize the figure of the mistress in a country cheating song, but neither song takes quite the same approach as Nettles' does.

¹⁴⁵ Roznovsky, "The Story Behind Sugarland's 'Stay'."

Nettles' composition uses a structure that moves the melody forward alongside the sentiments expressed by the narrator. The form of "Stay" is two verses followed by a pre-chorus and a chorus;¹⁴⁶ another verse, pre-chorus, and chorus; and a bridge followed by a lyrically altered chorus that reflects the changes that occurred through the course of the song's narrative. Each verse contains three couplets with an additional line for emphasizing the narrator's emotions, such as "and I'll be crying" from the first verse or "and I'm tired of waiting" from the third. The pre-choruses utilize one couplet each, the lyrics of which further emphasize the emotions of the narrator in her role as a mistress. The melodies of the pre-choruses move upward and forward into the opening line of the chorus and its all-important lyrics: "Why don't you stay?" In fact, this question book-ends the choruses and represents the song's refrain.

Nettles employs a device that by the late 2000s was not uncommon in country music in her use of slightly different words in the final chorus of "Stay" to reflect the ending of the narrator's illicit romance. For example, the narrator tells her lover in the first two choruses that she is "down on [her] knees," begging him to stay with her, but the final verse reflects her confidence in her decision to leave by changing that lyric to say she is "up off [her] knees." More importantly, the place the narrator asks her lover to "stay" changes in the last chorus from her own bed to his wife's bed. Instead of "when she calls you to go," Nettles sings "when she begs you not to go," before telling her lover she no longer wants to "live this way," and that he can stay where he is. Pronouns change

¹⁴⁶ The melody and lyrics of a pre-chorus distinguish it from the song sections surrounding it, but the lyrics may change each time it repeats. A pre-chorus is notably short, usually only one or two lines of lyrics, and aids in the transition between a verse and a chorus. Further, it does not always occur before every chorus in a song. Neal, "Narrative Paradigms," 45; Braheny, *The Craft and Business of Song Writing*, 69.

from second to first person or from plural to singular, and the question that appeals as universal to mistress' experiences becomes its own response: "Don't I give you what you need?" is answered with "You can't give me what I need." These apparently minor changes to the words have a major impact on the meaning of the chorus and the song itself. The final chorus makes it clear that not only does the narrator end her relationship with a married man, but she does it because she believes she deserves better, rather than because she realizes that the man will never end his marriage for her, as Sweeney's song, discussed below, depicts.

In an effort to emphasize the emotions evident in Nettles' powerful voice, Sugarland chose to keep the instrumentation minimal, cementing the sense of empathy the audience feels with the mistress narrating the song. "Stay" features a simple acoustic guitar accompaniment of a single singer, without the typical back-up vocals or harmonies from Nettles' fellow band member, Kristian Bush, as is usually heard in other songs by the pair. The only additional instrumentation is a subtle contribution from an organ that serves mainly to emphasize chord structure and narrative flow while adding an eerie, sad, and emotive quality to the song. This ingenious combination of instruments used primarily for harmonic purposes allows the lyrics and Nettles' voice to convey extreme emotion to the audience in a way that humanizes the mistress figure in country music the way no woman's song did before.

In contrast to Nettles, Sunny Sweeney and her co-writers of "From a Table Away" evoke a specific incident in which the "other woman" observes her lover with his wife; the apparently loving married couple does not notice her at the next table in a restaurant, and it pains the narrator to watch them. While she realizes that her lover's

marriage is not crumbling, despite his declarations otherwise, the final lines of the song merely suggest that the illicit relationship *may* end, with the lines, “I guess you’re gonna stay / A table away.”

“From a Table Away” also differs greatly from “Stay” in form and instrumentation, reverting back to older standards in this area. The form of “From a Table Away” is an instrumental intro followed by a verse and a chorus, another verse and chorus, and a tag. This is a modified verse-chorus form, also true of “Stay,” but “From a Table Away” modifies the form more simply than Sugarland’s song does. The form of Sweeney’s song, which she co-wrote with Bob DiPiero and Karyn Rochelle, differs from Nettles’ by adding an instrumental section after the first chorus, omitting a bridge, and altering the final chorus with the addition of a substantial tag rather than with new lyrics. The tag utilizes half the chorus with the final line repeated. As for the instrumentation, Sweeney’s song reflects the typical sound of the time period, featuring much thicker production than Sugarland’s recording by including steel guitar, banjo, fiddle, electric and rhythm guitars, and drumset.

Sweeney mentions in an interview with Alanna Conaway that she and her co-writers decided to narrate from the mistress’ point of view as they believe such songs are rare, “because nobody wants to be known as that” (i.e. the “other woman”).¹⁴⁷ This speaks to the idea that, in order to achieve success in the country music industry, women usually choose to portray themselves as fairly wholesome, or at least as the type of woman who would never form a romantic relationship with someone else’s partner.

¹⁴⁷ Alanna Conaway, “Sunny Sweeney, ‘From a Table Away’ – Lyrics Uncovered,” *Taste of Country*, January 19, 2011, <http://tasteofcountry.com/sunny-sweeney-from-a-table-away-lyrics/> (accessed January 19, 2017).

Nettles also demonstrated this idea in the way she initially marketed “Stay,” as discussed above, and both singers emphasize their lack of personal experience with infidelity as part of the narratives surrounding the songs’ creations.¹⁴⁸

In spite of how closely Sugarland’s and Sweeney’s songs are related, both in approach and chronologically, they differ a great deal. Released within five years of each other, the songs both make an effort to humanize the “other woman” through telling her side of the story.¹⁴⁹ However, “From a Table Away” moves past the humanizing and into attempting to prove the innocence of the mistress. In its lyrics, as reviewer Sam Gazdziak writes, “the cheating husband’s lies are unraveled all at once,” especially in the second verse, where Sweeney sings that her lover’s wife looks “nothing like the things you said.”¹⁵⁰ Featuring the husband’s lies to his mistress gives the audience the sense that he duped her into dating him. She believed, until the incident that provides the song’s framework, that the man truly would divorce his wife in favor of his mistress, and this belief apparently absolves her of some guilt or immorality. The audience gets the sense that the song’s narrator became entangled with this man before realizing he was already married to someone else.

Previous cheating songs, especially those *not* included in this category, emphasize the emotional toll on the wife, while the “other woman” remains a sort of phantom or demon, but not necessarily a person. This contributes to competitive relationships

¹⁴⁸ Roznovsky, “The Story Behind Sugarland’s ‘Stay’.”

¹⁴⁹ Sam Gazdziak, “Sunny Sweeney – ‘From A Table Away’,” The9513.com, June 29, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130513022103/http://www.the9513.com/sunny-sweeney-from-a-table-away/> (accessed January 20, 2017).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

between women when it comes to men. Yet at the end of “Stay,” the narrator does not choose to leave because she knows her adulterous affair is morally wrong, but rather she leaves as a form of self-preservation and an indication that she is strong enough to stand on her own, with no man to support her. The song displays a feminist element, and much less belief in the adage that “love conquers all” than in most of the other songs in this category. Interestingly, the kinds of songs that topped the country charts in the years since its release do not demonstrate that “Stay” made a particularly large impact on this category of cheating songs, in spite of its strong and positive influence on Nettles’ career. As already mentioned, the closest anyone came to Nettles’ sentiment was Sweeney, but even she does not quite indicate that her forbidden relationship ended or will soon end. Several recent, non-cheating songs hint at the importance of independence for women, but overall, women’s country music continues to produce songs that fit in the same molds used for decades. Although the country music industry prides itself on highlighting the everyday aspects of life in America, they still do not often acknowledge a feminist movement, homosexuals, or many people of color within their ranks.¹⁵¹ This means that although Sugarland had a hit with their strong, feminist mistress, many country performers still view such an open, strong female approach as a major risk for their careers.

¹⁵¹ One of the many examples of a lack of diversity among country performers is that women of color generally received no attention from or in the industry until the recent success of Mickey Guyton’s first single, “Better Than You Left Me,” released in 2015.

WHEN WIFE AND MISTRESS MEET: FROM CONFRONTATION TO TEAMWORK

This study contains a group of songs in which the female narrator directly addresses a woman participating in an affair with her partner. In these songs, the unfaithful partner is male, but the direct conflict depicted occurs between two women.¹⁵² Women in country music exclusively produce this category of cheating songs, noted by scholars such as Charles Jaret and Jacqueline Boles as an “interesting aspect of country music’s treatment of gender and sexuality.”¹⁵³ Jaret and Boles add that it is much more likely that “a female character in a song speaks directly to or about her sexual rival (‘the other woman’), in contrast to how rarely males in country songs refer to another man who is either after or has already seduced ‘his woman.’”¹⁵⁴

Table 8.

Encounters Between a Faithful Partner and the "Other Woman"		
Year	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)
1966	"You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)"	Loretta Lynn
1968	"Fist City"	Loretta Lynn
1969	"Woman of the World (Leave My World Alone)"	Loretta Lynn
1978	"Woman to Woman"	Barbara Mandrell
1993	"Does He Love You"	Reba McEntire with Linda Davis
2013	"Two Black Cadillacs"	Carrie Underwood

¹⁵² Table 8 on page 90 contains a complete list of songs included in this category.

¹⁵³ Jaret and Boles, “Sounds of Seduction,” 263.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

While this approach's presence in the field of data at hand diminishes over the span of years examined, it reflects a part of American culture that is not entirely extinct: women who, as Jaret and Boles phrase it, "are socialized to see other women as potential sexual rivals."¹⁵⁵ They continue that women's distrust of each other, combined with an underlying idea in country music that "men get special praise or merit for being faithful, while from women it is expected,"¹⁵⁶ leads to the attitude found in many songs that a man does not hold the blame for his own inability to remain faithful to one partner. Of the six songs in this category, only the last two to appear on a *Billboard* chart do not blame the "other woman" or portray the adulterous man as unable to "see that the 'other woman' is conniving"¹⁵⁷ and tricking him into a relationship with her. One of the songs even goes so far as to indicate that the straying man was "duped by her but will pay later when she abandons him for another."¹⁵⁸

Unsurprisingly, Loretta Lynn contributed the earliest song in this category, as well as the most by one artist. In fact, the lyrical framework is something of a trademark for Lynn. Three of her songs that took this approach qualify for this study, the 1966 classic "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)," "Fist City" (1968), and "Woman of the World (Leave My World Alone)" (1969). Only three other hit cheating songs, each by a different female performer, shared Lynn's approach.

¹⁵⁵ Jaret and Boles, "Sounds of Seduction," 264.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 263.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Lynn famously relates her real husband's philandering in her autobiography, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, wherein she also discusses the inspiration for various songs she wrote, of which a large portion focus on interactions with or about men.¹⁵⁹ The extremely well-known "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" is Lynn's first musical confrontation with a woman claiming Lynn's husband as her own, and it is commonly viewed as heavily sourced from her own life, although it is not fully autobiographical.¹⁶⁰ In it, Lynn tells the "other woman" that the man whose affection they shared would never leave his wife for someone less womanly. Lynn's next hit in this category, "Fist City," uses framing along the same lines, except that Lynn threatens the "other woman" with physical violence, telling her to "lay off of my man if you don't wanna go to Fist City." According to Lynn herself, the song's title references an interaction with a woman shortly after the Lynns bought and moved into the small town of Hurricane Mills, Tennessee.¹⁶¹

Lynn's last song in this category presents her interaction with the "other woman" a little bit differently from the first two, partly because she did not write it herself. It is therefore less autobiographical and more easily interpreted as a song in which Lynn plays a character. In "Woman of the World," Lynn's narrator addresses the "other woman" in a pleading tone. While she behaves in a less than friendly way toward the seductress, telling her, "You're the devil's woman," the narrator focuses more on asking the "other woman" to show the man mercy. She paints him as a naïve country boy who will suffer when this temptress from the city leaves him. The narrator offers a further appeal to the

¹⁵⁹ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, 92, 118, 132.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁶¹ Yes, they bought the *whole* town. See: Loretta Lynn, *Honky Tonk Girl: My Life in Lyrics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 47; Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, 124-130.

“woman of the world” on her own behalf; she knows her partner’s heart will break and she does not want “to watch him hurtin’ after you are gone.”

The songs in this category performed by women other than Lynn begin with Barbara Mandrell’s “Woman to Woman” (1977), which featured on *Billboard*’s year-end country songs chart in 1978, is framed as a phone call from the wife to the “other woman,” in which the wife tells the mistress that she will not “let you break up my happy home.” The next song in this category is an anomaly in the study as a whole: Reba McEntire’s 1993 duet with Linda Davis, “Does He Love You.” This duet between the wife and the “other woman” presents them addressing each other. It differs a great deal from the previous four songs in the category particularly in that the wife reveals little to no identifiable belligerence towards the mistress. Indeed, they both speak to each other with a level of neutrality. Finally, Carrie Underwood tells the tale of a wife and a mistress who conspire to have their mutual partner killed in revenge for his adultery in her 2013 hit, “Two Black Cadillacs,” building on McEntire’s lack of animosity between the women by showing their cooperation, thereby bringing an entirely new approach to this group of songs.

All but the most recent of these songs promote standing by your man regardless of his misbehavior, to paraphrase the famous Tammy Wynette song. They also mostly operate on the assumption that men inevitably stray, and any actual affair is the “other woman’s” fault for luring him into her trap.¹⁶² They portray a suspicion among women

¹⁶² Jaret and Boles, “Sounds of Seduction,” 263.

that is no longer as evident in women's cheating songs.¹⁶³ A closer examination of half of this category's songs follows in order to highlight the social and musical continuum along which this group of songs progressed.

Loretta Lynn's "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" makes history as the first to address the "other woman" directly, simultaneously belittling and challenging her with such lyrics as "women like you they're a dime a dozen" and "it'll be over my dead body." Released in 1966, "You Ain't Woman Enough" is one of the earlier songs to reflect a solid style from Lynn. At the time of its radio and chart debuts, pioneering women performers such as Kitty Wells and Patsy Cline were still fresh in the industry's mind, and they sang about heartbreak and infidelity in much more helpless ways and, particularly in Cline's case, with much more polished sounds.¹⁶⁴

Lynn's first foray into confronting the "other woman" is famously less autobiographical than much of her self-penned music, but she still uses it as a way of proving her authenticity as a country performer. Lynn herself related the story of her inspiration for the song in many instances, including in *Coal Miner's Daughter*, where she adds that "everyone says all my songs are about myself. That's not completely true, because if I did all the things I write about, I wouldn't be here, I'd be all worn out in some old people's home. But I've seen things, and that's *almost* the same as doing

¹⁶³ While one more recent song in particular, Gretchen Wilson's "Homewrecker" (2004), portrays overt suspicion of another woman, most modern suspicion does not come out and say that the "other woman" is at fault for initiating the affair, it only portrays her as attractive to the man. Examples include: Patty Loveless' "Blame It on Your Heart" (1993), Sara Evans' "Cheatin'" (2005), Carrie Underwood's "Before He Cheats" (2006), and Taylor Swift's "Should've Said No" (2006). Jaret and Boles, "Sounds of Seduction," 264.

¹⁶⁴ Patsy Cline was a leader in the Nashville Sound movement. Jensen, "Creating the Nashville Sound," 157.

‘em.’”¹⁶⁵ In the case of “You Ain’t Woman Enough,” Lynn relates in her autobiography that a young woman who came to talk to her backstage before a show inspired Lynn to write the song. The anonymous woman pointed out her own husband with his girlfriend in the audience. Lynn says “to me, she was twice the woman that other gal was.”¹⁶⁶ When she told the young wife as much, her phrasing inspired the title and refrain of this song, and her pep talk inspired the young woman to fight for, and ultimately win back, her husband.¹⁶⁷

Lynn tended to use a set of standard forms within her own writing, and “You Ain’t Woman Enough” is no exception. It follows her typical verse-chorus form, beginning with a brief instrumental intro, then moves to a verse and chorus, followed by a short instrumental bridge and another verse and chorus, this time with a tag: the last line repeats, taken up in range for climactic emphasis. Each vocal section in “You Ain’t Woman Enough,” features a refrain as its last line: “you ain’t woman enough to take my man.” It makes the song’s title more memorable through repetition, in this case a repetition of both the words and the melody. This also means that the last line of each verse is the same in each iteration, in spite of the other lyrics changing. Lest the identical ending lines of each vocal section confuse a listener regarding the song’s structure, the instrumentation on the studio recording changes between the verses and choruses. The resonator guitar that introduces the song and features throughout the verses drops out during the choruses, replaced with steel guitar. The piano remains a part of the rhythm

¹⁶⁵ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 92.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

section through the verses, but contributes a countermelody to the choruses. The subtle backup singers of the verses become much more prominent in the choruses, adding the final piece of a more heavily produced accompaniment for the choruses in “You Ain’t Woman Enough.”

The musical accompaniment for “You Ain’t Woman Enough” is fuller than in many of Lynn’s songs, contributing to the effect of confidence she portrays as she sings. It moves forward almost relentlessly in a square meter, driven by the “boom-chick” of the rhythm section’s bass line and drum kit. However, the musical accompaniment stops completely on two occasions. Both occur during a chorus, when Lynn reaches the lyrics, “I’m gonna stand right here.” The forward movement of the music stands still to emphasize that Lynn’s narrator also stands between the world and her husband. There is a pattern throughout the song of upward stepwise motions, such as the opening guitar’s upward movement into the rest of the song and the movement of the bass line, as performed by piano and double bass, upward into new lines of lyrics. The exception to this role for the bass parts is the downward movement into the choruses, which further sets those sections apart from the verses. Video recordings abound of live television performances of “You Ain’t Woman Enough” in which the accompaniment is sparser, as the house band for these shows tended to feature fewer instruments than Lynn used in her studio.

Lynn became hugely popular by being open and frank about women’s lives, especially those of working class women, which contributed to her reputation as a trailblazer in country music. Her typical musical accompaniment is designed to allow the audience to fully grasp Lynn’s authenticity through the lyrics as they flow forth. “You

Ain't Woman Enough" was an honest portrayal of what she saw happening around her as she performed in bars and clubs, and it now stands as a classic example of the assumption that women actively compete with each other for men.¹⁶⁸ The attitude portrayed in this song that women want to take what other women have lessens over time, in part because of the increased prominence of feminism.

Next along the continuum in which women learn to work together is "Does He Love You" by Reba McEntire with Linda Davis, which appeared on the year-end country songs chart in 1993. In a conversation between the two narrators, McEntire portrays a man's wife while Davis represents the same man's mistress. Each singer sings a verse, then they sing the chorus together. They repeat this process with a bit of alteration at the end of the verse, and this time the chorus is followed by an electric guitar solo and vocal bridge. Next are a stepwise upward modulation and a final chorus, altered slightly melodically to help create a musical climax. The song ends with a tag made of a final repetition of the title by McEntire alone. In spite of plenty of other harmonizing, Davis does not sing during the song's tag, which alludes to McEntire's character deserving more of the man's love than Davis' does. In addition to the electric guitar solo, the song utilizes piano, steel guitar, and drums played over rhythm guitar and banjo to emphasize the emotional ups and downs in the lyrics and in the women's voices.

This song's notability stems from, in the supposedly liberated 1990s, the women's mutual unwillingness to give up on the man despite knowing about each other. Each of the women believes that the man truly loves her, and they wonder if he feels the same

¹⁶⁸ Although Lynn's autobiography is likely the first, sources about the creation of this song abound, because Lynn tells the story to any interviewer who asks. It evolved a bit over the decades, and is now as legendary as the song and Lynn herself. Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, 92.

about the other: “Does he love you / Like he loves me?” While this song portrays the emotional turmoil that such a situation causes, neither woman indicates she plans to end her relationship with the man. Not only do the women stand by their man, but neither woman indicates that she harbors any ill will toward the other. The song even takes the step of acknowledging the immorality of the situation in the line that Davis sings from the “other woman’s” perspective, “And shouldn’t I be ashamed?”

Yet, by 1993, a listener expects almost no traces of the “stand by your man” attitude to remain. Even McEntire’s previous hit cheating song, “Whoever’s in New England” from 1986, feels a bit out-of-date for the time in its narrator’s utter devotion to her straying husband.¹⁶⁹ However, McEntire tends to be accurate with her song selection for her particular fanbase,¹⁷⁰ so her most recent hit cheating song, “Turn On the Radio” (2010), reflects the more modern attitude that women no longer feel obligated to stick around while a man goes out chasing other women.

Carrie Underwood’s “Two Black Cadillacs” follows the same path as “Does He Love You” in that the women speak to each other, but it diverges from there. A solo piece rather than a duet, “Two Black Cadillacs” presents a story in third person rather than in first person, and, most importantly, it tells the story of two women conspiring to take revenge on their mutual partner before they ever meet face to face. It also follows in

¹⁶⁹ The devotion is similar to that of Kitty Wells’ narrator in “Unloved, Unwanted” (1962), except that McEntire’s character addresses the cheating husband directly rather than in an open letter format.

¹⁷⁰ Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 103.

the footsteps of some other country songs by women who seek murder as revenge for such misdeeds as physical abuse and infidelity.¹⁷¹

The collaboration between the women in “Two Black Cadillacs” shows that they do not blame each other for their participation in the love triangle. Rather, they exclusively blame the man. This is a decidedly modern attitude in women’s cheating songs.¹⁷² In order to convey this, “Two Black Cadillacs” begins with an intro, a verse, and a chorus. Another verse and chorus follow before the song proceeds to its bridge, final chorus, and outro.¹⁷³ In the first verse, Underwood sets the scene as a funeral for a man at which his wife and mistress are “meeting for the first time.” The choruses indicate that no one in the man’s life knew about his affair, but once the “women in the two black veils” discovered each other’s presence in his life, “he’s not the only one who [has] a secret to hide.” The second verse and the bridge fill in the rest of the details surrounding the man’s death. “Turns out he’d been lying to both” his wife and his mistress all along, and they decide to seek revenge. The audience can only wonder exactly how they get away with murdering their mutual partner without meeting in person until his funeral, but the sense of mystery adds to the song’s appeal. This ability to get away with murder, not

¹⁷¹ This category of songs was really opened up with Martina McBride’s 1994 hit, “Independence Day,” which not only tackled domestic abuse but also showed a woman finding an escape from it in a dramatic fashion. Lawler, *Songs of Life*, 137; Mansfield, *Grand Ole Opry*, 68. Other examples of women’s murder-as-revenge songs include the Dixie Chicks’ “Goodbye Earl” (1999), Miranda Lambert’s “Sin for a Sin” (2009) and “Gunpowder and Lead” (2007), and Reba McEntire’s “The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia” (1991).

¹⁷² In this study, the blame for infidelity does not begin to shift from the women involved to exclusively the man until the late 1980s.

¹⁷³ An outro is essentially the opposite of an intro: an instrumental section that ends the song. Neal, “Narrative Paradigms,” 44.

unlike that of the women in “Goodbye Earl” (2000) by the Dixie Chicks, adds to the sense that this song warns men to reconsider cheating.

This group of country songs effectively represents changes over the past several decades in the way women relate to each other. Feminism, in its various forms, encourages women to work with each other against injustices, and that certainly manifests itself in the last of these wife-and-mistress songs.¹⁷⁴ However, the rest of the songs in the category should not be ignored. They become gradually less confrontational over time, reflecting the reticence felt by some women as they are encouraged to trust each other fully. That reticence lessened as the years passed, but it lingers in a small measure today.

WOMEN’S UNUSUAL REACTIONS TO MEN CHEATING

Slightly more than half of the women in this study whose partners cheat on them break off the relationship, but some of them take additional retaliatory action. Of forty-eight men who cheat on their partners, twenty-three of them do not receive any form of retaliation, punishment, or consequence at the hands of their faithful partners. The twenty-five faithful female partners who remain at least indicate their intent to end their relationships with the adulterous men. Seven of them go further by singing about additional retaliation, while three more women offer threats or predictions of retaliation.¹⁷⁵ The forms of retaliation vary, but they fit fairly neatly into two categories: destruction and reciprocation. A destructive reaction to the discovery of a partner’s

¹⁷⁴ *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender*, s.vv. “The Feminist Movement,” “Feminist Theories.”

¹⁷⁵ Table 9 lists every song featuring retaliation, while Table 10 contains the songs that allude to retaliation. See page 101 for both tables.

indiscretions is logical in a way, and not unexpected in spite of being somewhat unusual in the repertoire. However, country music audiences expect reciprocal infidelity much less than other reactions, and while the logic behind it makes sense to an extent, it is a rather devious form of revenge. Before exploring more deeply the songs which portray women reciprocating their partner's infidelity, a brief summary of the lyrical content of each song that discusses retaliation other than a breakup follows for context.

Table 9.

Songs Featuring Women Retaliating Beyond Breakups For Infidelity			
Year	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)	Form of Retaliation
1968	"You've Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)"	Loretta Lynn	Reciprocal cheating
1997	"She Drew a Broken Heart"	Patty Loveless	Destroys fancy sheets
2001	"When God-Fearin' Women Get the Blues"	Martina McBride	Paints the town red
2006-2007	"Before He Cheats"	Carrie Underwood	Destroys his truck
2006	"Cheatin'"	Sara Evans	Leaves him with nothing
2010	"White Liar"	Miranda Lambert	Reciprocal cheating
2013	"Two Black Cadillacs"	Carrie Underwood	Homicide

Table 10.

Songs Featuring Promised Retaliation Beyond Breakups For Infidelity			
Year	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)	Form of Promised Retaliation
1993	"Blame It on Your Heart"	Patty Loveless	Someone cheating on him
2011	"You Lie"	The Band Perry	Violence at her father's hands
2013	"Tornado"	Little Big Town	Utter destruction

Women's Retaliatory Actions Against Cheating Partners

As in many areas of this study and her life, Loretta Lynn is the first woman to present a song that offers an option for punishing an unfaithful partner besides simply ending the relationship.¹⁷⁶ In her 1968 hit “You’ve Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me),” Lynn emphasizes that “I can’t bring myself to leave though I know I should,” but she clearly also cannot sit idly by. Her partner “bragged” about his infidelity to her, and throughout the song, the narrator’s annoyance with the situation builds, culminating in her own “stepping out.” Interestingly, this song does not specifically include the end of the relationship. The audience can only wonder whether the couple continues on in their volatile non-monogamy, or if the woman’s form of revenge leads to the relationship’s demise.

The next performer to mention retaliatory actions against a cheater is Patty Loveless, who contributes two songs to this group. The first is “Blame It on Your Heart” (1993), in which she tells her partner why she ended their relationship. She runs through a list of ways to say he was a terrible partner, saying he has a “lying, cheating, cold dead-beating, two-timing, double-dealing, mean mistreating” heart. She goes one step further by also telling the man that he is “headin’ for a bad break” and implying that he will receive his comeuppance in the form of a partner who treats him the way he treated the narrator. Next, Loveless’ “She Drew a Broken Heart” (1996) includes both a breakup and some very mild destruction, presented from a third-person perspective. Loveless’

¹⁷⁶ Other notable firsts in her career include that she was the first woman in country music to earn a certified gold album, for “Don’t Come Home A-Drinkin’ (With Lovin’ on Your Mind)” in 1967, and the first woman to win the Country Music Association’s Entertainer of the Year award in 1972. Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 119, 159, 161.

narration addresses the unfaithful man and outlines the steps his faithful partner ultimately took to make him understand that his illicit affairs are why she left. Her final goodbye as she leaves involves drawing a broken heart with the man's name inside. The narrator essentially translates the woman's message for the cheating ex-partner when she informs him that "that red broken heart belongs to you."

In 2001, Martina McBride's hit song "When God-Fearin' Women Get the Blues" makes its mark as the next song to discuss a woman's destructive reaction to discovering her husband's infidelity. Like Loveless' latter song, it offers its tale from a third-person perspective. However, in this case, the narrator tells the story to the audience rather than the cheater, and speaks from the perspective of an acquaintance of the couple rather than an omniscient narrator. She highlights the unexpected and highly immoral nature of the scandal by asserting that "cheatin' shows your complete lack of style." The wife, scorned after "twenty-five years of love and devotion," causes apparently more accidental than purposeful damage when she throws her "Ford into reverse." The action happens in the introduction of this song, while the rest of the lyrics mainly speculate on the kind of trouble a "God-fearin' woman" might get into while in the midst of such a major upheaval in her life. This is also the first song in the study that includes both a breakup and significant retaliatory actions, but the angry female partner still does not provide the narration in "When God-Fearin' Women Get the Blues."

Sara Evans' "Cheatin'" (2005) illustrates a slightly less obvious manner of destruction as the narrator seeks revenge. While her form of revenge does not involve violence, the faithful woman details her dismantling of her partner's comfortable life in retaliation for his infidelity, including that she takes all his creature comforts for herself.

She makes him leave their shared home to live in a “furnished room,” where he also no longer enjoys the privilege of eating her cooking. She goes so far as to force him to switch vehicles with her, telling him his truck makes “a cozy ride for dating.” The song uses the framework of a list of consequences the man “should have thought of” while he cheated, or, more likely, before he decided to cheat.

Carrie Underwood’s “Before He Cheats” was discussed extensively in a previous section of this thesis, but a quick summary of its important points is necessary here as well. It experienced such immense popularity that it appeared on two consecutive year-end country songs charts in 2006 and 2007 and enjoyed crossover success in the pop market.¹⁷⁷ The narrator in “Before He Cheats” chooses as her breakup method extensive cosmetic damage to her cheating boyfriend’s pickup truck wrought by her own hand while he looks for a new woman to take home from a bar. Its appeal likely comes from the very sweet revenge that the narrator exacts on the unfaithful man.

In 2010, Miranda Lambert’s “White Liar” is the next song to indicate that a woman found a novel way to demonstrate her dissatisfaction with her relationship. In this case, the song presents a confrontation with the cheating partner at the end of which the narrator reveals that she cheated in retaliation. Similar to Lynn’s song about reciprocal infidelity, the song does not offer a solid indication that the relationship it depicts ends, but implies that it will more strongly than Lynn’s does, due to the confrontational framing.

The Band Perry’s hit “You Lie” (2011) serves as an example of promised retaliation with the lyrics, “my daddy’s gonna straighten you out / Like a piece of wire.”

¹⁷⁷ It was number six out of one hundred on *Billboard*’s year-end “Hot 100 Songs” in 2007.

The rest of the song presents the point of view of a woman whose husband or fiancé cheated on her. She confronts him about it, indicating that she plans to end the relationship and “slip off the ring that you put on my finger” so she can throw it into the Mississippi River.

Finally, two songs from the 2013 year-end country songs chart fall into this category, one with promised retaliation and one with actual action taken. Little Big Town’s “Tornado” promises utter destruction as a form of punishment for a cheater. In it, the narrator compares herself to a tornado that seeks to destroy the misbehaving man. It also features a level of ambiguity as to the form the man’s misbehavior took, either infidelity or physical abuse, or both.¹⁷⁸ The last song in this category received more thorough discussion previously in this thesis, but its plot warrants a brief reexamination here. While Carrie Underwood’s “Two Black Cadillacs,” is less direct than her earlier song, “Before He Cheats,” due to an omniscient third-person narrator, it is simultaneously more violent than the previous hit in that the man’s infidelity ultimately results in his own untimely death. Underwood’s narrator tells the story of a wife and a mistress who discover each other’s existence, plot their mutual partner’s demise, and only meet at his funeral, where “they shared a crimson smile” and “left the secret at the grave.” The songs in this category from 2013 share a violent approach to revenge against a cheater, but they also share a sense of removal in that Little Big Town lets the

¹⁷⁸ One review indicates that the song addresses a man who is both adulterous and abusive, insinuating that the songwriters left the lyrics intentionally ambiguous. Billy Dukes, “Little Big Town, ‘Tornado’ - Song Review,” *Taste of Country*, September 20, 2012, <http://tasteofcountry.com/little-big-town-tornado-song/> (accessed February 20, 2017).

punishment happen after the song and Underwood does not portray either of the women in the love triangle she sings about.

Reciprocal Infidelity as a Form of Retaliation

Loretta Lynn's 1968 hit "You've Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)" and Miranda Lambert's 2010 hit "White Liar" are the only two songs in this study in which a woman retaliates for a man's infidelity by cheating on him; in other words, the women reciprocate their partners' infidelity. These two songs count among very few in which, as C.R. Chandler, et al., phrase it, "women were depicted . . . as cheating, or threatening to do so, in reprisal for their husband's infidelity," a motivation which men do not express in their cheating songs.¹⁷⁹ These two songs are interesting when viewed together because they contain similar scenarios but the songs were popular in such different times.

Curiously, no women sang reciprocation songs with as much success in the years between Lynn's and Lambert's songs. They were hits forty-two years apart; Don Trowbridge wrote Lynn's song, Lambert herself and Natalie Hemby wrote Lambert's. Perhaps the songwriters' genders contributed to this situation; men are bold enough, or worried enough, to consider reciprocal cheating in country songs in the sixties, but women are not so bold for another four-plus decades. Yet in spite of the time between them and the differences in their composers, these songs share a similar topical approach. However, a similar topical approach does not necessarily mean all aspects of the narrative and musical approaches are alike. For example, in Lynn's song, the narrator evolves from

¹⁷⁹ Chandler, et al., "Cheaters Sometimes Win," 142.

loving wife to honky-tonk angel, instead of the other way around, as country music audiences expect. In contrast, Lambert's song does not emphasize the virtue of the narrator prior to her lover's infidelity. In hindsight, the reciprocation of infidelity seems more daring for 1968 than for a modern-day woman, and female songwriters grow more direct in their approaches to cheating in the years since.¹⁸⁰ As observed in the songs in this study, a general trend among female songwriters over time shows not only increased directness in addressing infidelity, but also worsening punishments and stronger efforts to find the untold story or most unusual approach.¹⁸¹

In the 1960s, it was less acceptable for women to be open about their sexual activities than it is now, and society expected that "good" women slept with only their husbands. These days, women can be freer. Adultery remains unacceptable if unfortunately common, but modern audiences assume that the prospect of their partner's infidelity makes women angry, and that they will find a way to express that anger to their partners. Songs like Carrie Underwood's "Before He Cheats" and Lambert's "White Liar" demonstrate this idea quite well. In "Before He Cheats," the narrator is obviously not married to the man, but the marital status of the primary couple in "White Liar" remains unclear.¹⁸² On the other hand, the primary couple in Lynn's "You've Just Stepped In" are very clearly married to each other. In this song, the wife works up to

¹⁸⁰ Naturally, exceptions to this occur throughout the study, such as Loretta Lynn's very early directness, and Sunny Sweeney's later cliffhanger of a song, as discussed above.

¹⁸¹ Songs that show worsening punishments include Reba McEntire's "Take It Back" (1992), The Band Perry's "You Lie" (2011), and Carrie Underwood's "Two Black Cadillacs" (2012). Efforts to present an unusual approach include The Judds' "Change of Heart" (1988), Sugarland's "Stay" (2007), and Ashton Shepherd's "Look It Up" (2011).

¹⁸² In "Before He Cheats," the chorus makes this clear when the narrator says, "maybe *next time* he'll think before he cheats"; emphasis added.

cheating back, threatening retaliation before finally going through with it. But in 2010, the woman in “White Liar” discovered her partner’s cheating *and* took her revenge before confronting him with it. Her strength and independence allow her to take matters into her own hands, and quickly. Additionally, because American society generally frowns on infidelity, the idea of cheating as revenge is less easily justified than other forms of punishment for unfaithful partners.

“You’ve Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)” shares several similarities with many of Loretta Lynn’s other singles. Cheating was a popular topic for Lynn, as it was a very real part of her life; this song fits her repertoire and life story well, in spite of someone else writing it.¹⁸³ According to many country music scholars, including Jocelyn R. Neal, Lynn is known for performing “songs that spoke up for her man at the same time [as] they laid down the law for him and looked outward for what ambitions a woman might chase,” which this song demonstrates to an extent.¹⁸⁴ “You’ve Just Stepped In” deals more with scolding the husband and looking for new options as a woman than with defending the husband, which makes it especially powerful as evidence of Lynn’s unintended feminism.¹⁸⁵

On the other hand, “You’ve Just Stepped In” also stands out among Lynn’s hit cheating songs because it not only reprimands the cheating husband but also punishes him with an action outside of ending the relationship. Of the seven songs Lynn

¹⁸³ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 132.

¹⁸⁴ Neal, “Top Ten Country Music Stars,” 73.

¹⁸⁵ According to her autobiography, Lynn does not particularly approve of what she refers to exclusively as “Women’s Liberation,” but she does approve of sticking up for herself and other women. Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 55, 56, 118, 156-157.

contributed to the body of music examined here, three address the “other woman,” one is a duet in which lovers discuss their extramarital relationship, and the final three address a cheating spouse. Of the latter three, one narrator tells her husband that “one of these nights” he will “find it’s comin’ home to” him, one narrator indicates she will soon leave her husband by wishing him a happy birthday “since I won’t be here,” and finally, the narrator of “You’ve Just Stepped In” ends the song by telling her husband that she “just stepped in from steppin’ out on” him.¹⁸⁶ The final line of “You’ve Just Stepped In” sets it apart from the songs in Lynn’s repertoire as well as from the rest of the songs in the study. Her definitive action in “You’ve Just Stepped In” offsets her multitude of recorded songs that only lament her partner’s cheating or merely threaten separation, and say nothing of retaliation.

Lynn famously recorded songs that address topics seen as taboo in country music in the 1960s and 1970s that became runaway hits regardless.¹⁸⁷ For many reasons, including those discussed above, “You’ve Just Stepped In” counts among her singles that do so, a group which also includes “One’s on the Way” (1971), “The Pill” (1975), and “Rated ‘X’” (1972), among others.¹⁸⁸ According to Neal, Lynn “bridged a decade of social change with the most forthright country vocals ever penned or recorded.”¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, “You’ve Just Stepped In” also qualifies as a standout amongst Lynn’s music. Her other songs, when addressed to the cheating spouse, never indicate that she

¹⁸⁶ See, respectively: “Wine, Women and Song” (1964), “Happy Birthday” (1964), and “You’ve Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)” (1968).

¹⁸⁷ Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 267-268.

¹⁸⁸ To be clear, the last song in this group discusses divorce. The title is a play on “ex-wife.”

¹⁸⁹ Neal, “Top Ten Country Music Stars,” 73.

plans to cheat too. Many of the songs Lynn wrote herself directly address the “other woman,” which insinuates that she personally placed more of the blame on the woman than on her husband.¹⁹⁰ This makes “You’ve Just Stepped In” unique in her repertoire as well as in this study, in spite of how often Lynn addresses infidelity. Male authorship, and therefore also male experience and opinion, possibly relates to the use of reciprocal cheating in the conclusion of this song’s storyline. Perhaps this form of revenge cropped up because Don Trowbridge thought it was one of the worst punishments a cheating man can receive.

Musically speaking, “You’ve Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)” showcases piano to great effect, adding a timbral tribute to honky-tonk bars that references the behavior of the man in the song.¹⁹¹ Lynn’s songs typically feature guitars, including her own rhythm guitar playing, making the highlighted piano distinctive within her group of cheating songs. While a guitar and back-up vocals do contribute to this song, it primarily features piano. Lynn’s character sings against such a backdrop to bolster the authenticity of her own retaliatory actions against him.

In addition to the use of piano, the song’s form is unusual in the context of Lynn’s repertoire and in this study. One of very few women’s hit cheating songs to do so, “You’ve Just Stepped In” features both a chorus and a refrain but does not contain the refrain in the chorus. The basic form of Lynn’s song is verse, chorus, verse, chorus, verse, with an instrumental introduction and an instrumental break between the second verse and chorus sections. Most of her songs in this study follow a simple verse-chorus-

¹⁹⁰ Lynn with Vecsey, *Coal Miner’s Daughter*, 132.

¹⁹¹ Vander Wel, “I am a Honky-tonk Girl’,” 244-245; Cooper, “Honky Tonks, Jukeboxes, and Wild, Wild Women,” 663.

verse-chorus-tag form, but this one contains an additional verse instead of a tag.¹⁹² In fact, all of Lynn's hit cheating songs utilize some type of verse-chorus form. This reflects Neal's idea that "country songwriters have used similar compositional, literary, *formal*, and poetic devices in different songs to present the same types of narratives."¹⁹³ This song's slight deviation from Lynn's usual formal structure makes it simultaneously similar to and dissimilar from her other songs. The final verse itself serves to move the storyline along a little further, and gives the audience a rare view of the eventual outcome of the woman's threats against her partner.

Miranda Lambert's "White Liar" uses a similar concept to Lynn's song, but the songs' interpretations of it vary. Lambert's narrator lets the man know that his antics are not secret, and that she finds them unacceptable. Near the end of the song, the narrator drops "a bombshell" on her cheating partner, revealing that he was not alone in his infidelity. This differs from Lynn's approach, in which the narrator contemplates reciprocation throughout the song before finally acting on it in the last line of the final verse. Furthermore, "White Liar" allows some ambiguity in interpreting whether the situation actually includes cheating. In the lyric, "saw you on the street / With a redhead named Bernice," the man appears to be on a date, which for the purposes of this study qualifies as cheating. Then the woman indicates that she has "been lying too," insinuating that she also acted unfaithfully, but the lyrics are less than explicit about what each partner did besides lie. This contrasts with Lynn's song, which more directly addresses the couple's actions in spite of the use of the euphemistic phrase "stepping out."

¹⁹² Cheating songs in Lynn's usual form include "Happy Birthday" (1964), "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)" (1966), "Fist City" (1968), and "Woman of the World (Leave My World Alone)" (1969).

¹⁹³ Neal, "Narrative Paradigms," 42; emphasis added.

In the context of her wider repertoire, “White Liar” is milder than much of what Lambert records, considering her usual ferocity and frankness, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. For example, in “Sin for a Sin” (2009) and her more famous “Gunpowder and Lead” (2008), Lambert’s narrators clearly indicate that the men who have wronged them is dead or will die. The narrator in “White Liar” offers the less bloody punishment of reciprocation. This song also offers a less direct ending than “Sin for a Sin” and “Gunpowder and Lead” do, in that the narrator in “White Liar” does not make it clear whether the intent of the song’s events is to end her relationship with her unfaithful partner. However, the narrator in “White Liar” wavers less when it comes to the decision to cheat than Lynn’s character does in “You’ve Just Stepped In,” where the narrator threatens to do so before revealing that she finally followed through on her threats. Lambert’s narrator reciprocates and then informs the cheater of her knowledge and actions simultaneously. This easily connects with a general attitude in contemporary country music that women are strong enough to make their own decisions—there are no more girl singers, after all—and that their partners should not take them for granted in a relationship.

Another difference between Lynn’s song and Lambert’s is that “White Liar” follows a modified verse-chorus form, as “You’ve Just Stepped In” does, but Lambert’s tune contains more song sections, and choruses bookend the song instead of verses. Moreover, Lambert’s song plays for more than double the time of Lynn’s. “White Liar” lasts for four minutes and forty-eight seconds, while “You’ve Just Stepped In” runs for only two minutes and seventeen seconds. The overall form of “White Liar” is chorus, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, altered chorus. In the final chorus, the words switch

from second person to first as part of the indication that the narrator also cheated, and the final lines feature an altered melody for climactic emphasis. The song also includes instrumental sections at the beginning, before and after the brief vocal bridge, and at the end, all of which feature electric guitar. This song's heavy use of an instrument more commonly associated with rock and pop than with country supports the tough persona portrayed by the narrator and by Lambert. Although use of electric guitar and long instrumental sections are common in Lambert's repertoire, beginning the vocal section with a chorus rather than a verse is fairly unusual for popular country music around the time of this song's release, if not particularly uncommon for Lambert herself. Opening a song with a chorus is one of the ways Lambert looks to the past for inspiration.

While the juxtaposition of country tradition and feminist progress is sometimes difficult to pin down in her music, Lambert herself warrants labeling as both hard-core country and progressive, concepts that are usually contrary to each other in country music. She pushes the genre's limits musically, but still maintains an intense level of authenticity in her projection of her personal life, in her performances, and in her lyrics. Much like Lynn before her, Lambert pushes country's limits in several ways, including her focus on women and their lives. However, Lambert's focus is very modern, and arguably very feminist. Rather than singing almost exclusively about a woman's domestic role as Lynn did, Lambert sings about a variety of topics, including standing up to lying, cheating, and abusive men in ways such as keeping her own secrets and resorting to violence herself. She also makes a habit of singing lyrics that demonstrate solidarity with other women—a theme particularly prominent in her 2014 album, *Platinum*, in which she sings about maternal relationships, using appearance as a tool for

empowerment, and partying without men, to name a few topics.¹⁹⁴ Lambert's efforts to show solidarity with other women even extends to her membership in an all-female trio that writes and records together, known as the Pistol Annies.

Lynn's and Lambert's songs as a pair contrast most with the previously analyzed pair of songs by Kitty Wells and Carrie Underwood. While comparing Wells and Underwood's songs highlights the changes in the country music and its cheating songs over time, Lynn and Lambert's songs spotlight the continuity of the genre and the category of cheating songs within it. "You've Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)" and "White Liar" represent the self-reference in which the country music industry and its musicians take such pride. Yet, even as the songs prove a rigidity in country music, the subtle differences in topical and musical approaches as well as in the performers' personae demonstrate that an element of fluidity in the genre generated by the humanity of the art form always exists.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the examination of women's country music since 1962 with a focus on feminism and social changes in American society highlights certain contrasting themes in the genre. The ongoing dialectic tensions between country music and changing gender norms both mirror and are reflected in country's continued grappling with whether adherence to tradition and conventions or focus on a patriotic sense of individualism is more important. Another area where tensions arise is in decisions on

¹⁹⁴ For Lambert's songs referencing these topics, see, respectively, "Bathroom Sink," "Platinum," and her duet with Carrie Underwood, "Somethin' Bad."

whether the cheating trope should always be presented as immoral, or if its longtime presence in country music means that it has reached a level of ubiquity that allows it to be treated flippantly at times. Further, while the songs included in the corpus of this study generally center around a male character, most of the female performers still sing from a woman's perspective, about women's lives. A general lack of portrayals in country music of women's relationships outside of their primary romantic attachment is problematic from a feminist standpoint, but the fifty cheating songs examined here show that this supposed need for the presence of men in country songs does not preclude the women in those songs from showing their independence, strength, and individuality.

The musical examples addressed in this study show that the dominance of men as cheaters does not preclude a multitude of available approaches to women's country cheating songs. The set of hit songs examined show that some are remarkable in that they provide a baseline or standard for other songs to contrast with or deliberately contradict. The larger framework of this thesis involves exactly that idea: the comparison of two songs in which the narrator's husband or boyfriend has cheated on her serves as the backdrop for the remaining areas of focus. Songs featuring unfaithful women contrast against the idea of exclusively men cheating. Portrayals of extramarital affairs by the mistresses involved in them contradicts the idea that only the women whose husbands are unfaithful can participate in the conversation about cheating. Encounters between wives and mistresses show how unfaithful men bring women together in increasingly friendly ways over time. And the final set of musical examples shows that within the large group of female narrators who have been cheated on, the reactions to their situations vary widely.

Country music as an industry, genre, and culture understands that infidelity is immoral and hurtful, and relatively few songs revel in the illicit nature of adulterous relationships.¹⁹⁵ The very existence of songs that address the topic offers a condemnation of the behavior involved. However, some songs take the idea a step further and directly comment on the morals involved in cheating, whether by discussing the possibility of hurting the faithful partner(s) or by actually using the word “wrong” to describe a cheater’s actions.

When it comes to the immorality of cheating, two groups of songs in this study are proportionately most likely to address it, either directly or indirectly: those presented from a third-person perspective and those in the first-person perspective of the “other woman.”¹⁹⁶ Songs by an outside narrator, such as Martina McBride’s “When God-Fearin’ Women Get the Blues” (2001), usually present the story of the infidelity as a tale with a moral. The songs from the “other woman’s” perspective vary somewhat in their approach. For example, “Does He Love You” (1993) by Reba McEntire with Linda Davis acknowledges but does not internalize the immorality of the situation in the question that Davis asks as the “other woman,” “Shouldn’t I be ashamed?” Further, the narrators in Barbara Mandrell’s “(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don’t Want to Be Right” (1979) and Rosanne Cash’s “The Way We Make a Broken Heart” (1987) both discuss their awareness of the immorality of the illicit relationship, but both indicate that they plan to continue these relationships.

¹⁹⁵ Chandler, et al., “Cheaters Sometimes Win,” 138.

¹⁹⁶ In other words, these two categories share only one song between them that entirely neglects the subject of immorality in non-monogamous relationships, Kacey Musgraves’ “Merry Go ‘Round” from 2013, the most recent year to contain qualifying songs.

Country music's reputation as a conservative industry with a conservative audience contributes to the sense that all of country's cheating songs condemn adulterous behavior on some level. However, a few songs also belie that conclusion by presenting infidelity as ubiquitous either in society as a whole or as part of the "country" lifestyle. Examples include Linda Ronstadt's "When Will I Be Loved" (1975), Charly McClain's "Who's Cheatin' Who" (1980), and Kacey Musgraves' "Merry Go 'Round" (2012). Ronstadt's song includes cheating in a laundry list of ways men mistreated her in the past. McClain laments her own experience with a cheating partner within the framework of wondering exactly what everyone else does in their spare time, insinuating that her partner has plenty of company as a cheater. Finally, Musgraves' song tosses in a quick mention of cheating with the line from the chorus, "Daddy's hooked on Mary two doors down," that is part of the clever play on words associated with the song's title. Her song offers a commentary on small-town life and its various entrapments with a play on the nursery rhyme referenced in the title. The flippant mention of a man's adultery in the song shows that, by 2012, cheating is so deeply ingrained in country music culture that it hardly merits attention.

Each song in the corpus examined for this study is unique because of the specific combination of people who came together to create it and the social environment in which they did so. Although men predominantly feature as the member of a relationship who cheats, female cheaters still figure in women's songs about infidelity, as do mistresses. Cheating songs by female performers offer a wide range of narratives, from a woman reacting to her partner's cheating to two married people discussing their extramarital relationship with each other, from women who cheat in reciprocation to a

man murdering his cheating wife, and from wives threatening physical violence against their husbands' mistresses to women expressing their delight that the mistresses also dumped their ex-husbands.¹⁹⁷

While innovation and experimentation allow all forms of art to continue through history and into the future, many participants in the country music industry expect a continued emphasis on the traditions of the genre. Yet while adherence to tradition indicates rigidity, country music's traditions themselves are inherently fluid throughout the genre's history. In this study, all of the singers address the traditional country lyrical trope of infidelity, but each song is different, at least partly because of the varying traditions the singers claim to adhere to. Not only do these songs' lyrics vary widely, but their music does as well. From Loretta Lynn playing her own rhythm guitar to Barbara Mandrell's heavily disco-influenced music, or from Rosanne Cash's willingness to experiment with country's sound as displayed in the Latin influences of "The Way We Make a Broken Heart" to Miranda Lambert's genre-mixing in the rock-heavy sound of "White Liar" (2009), country music has certain pillars of consistency in its musical expression, among them pedal steel guitar and individuality.

Tension continues to exist between the influences of social conservatism and feminism in country music's history, culture, production, and performance, due in part to the dual emphases on adhering to tradition and displaying individualism. The songs examined by this study demonstrate both of these values, among others. Hit cheating songs performed by women since the early 1960s are powerful representations of how

¹⁹⁷ This final type of narrative mentioned did not appear in earlier discussions. It refers to a specific song: Kristen Kelly's "Ex-Old Man" (2012).

changes in societal forces external to the traditions and performance of country music alter the genre itself, as well as the conservative-leaning industry and culture connected to it.

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APPENDIX

<i>Billboard</i> Year-End Country Songs Chart Information For Cheating Songs Included in This Study					
Chart Date	Position on Chart	Song Title	Performing Artist(s)	Songwriter(s)	Original Release Date
December 29, 1962	23 out of 50	"Unloved, Unwanted"	Kitty Wells	Wayne P. Walker, Irene Stanton	January 6, 1962
December 29, 1962	47 out of 50	"Willingly"	Willie Nelson feat. Shirley Collie	Hank Cochran	March 17, 1962
December 28, 1963	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 26, 1964	16 out of 50	"Wine, Women and Song"	Loretta Lynn	Betty Sue Perry	April 4, 1964
December 26, 1964	tied at 26 out of 50	"Love Is No Excuse"	Dottie West and Jim Reeves	Justin Tubb	February 29, 1964
December 25, 1965	3 out of 50	"Yes, Mr. Peters"	Roy Drusky and Priscilla Mitchell	Larry Kolber, Steve Karliski	May 8, 1965
December 25, 1965	15 out of 50	"Happy Birthday"	Loretta Lynn	Roy Kitson	November 21, 1964
December 24, 1966	4 out of 100	"You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)"	Loretta Lynn	Loretta Lynn	May 21, 1966
December 30, 1967	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 28, 1968	12 out of 50	"Fist City"	Loretta Lynn	Loretta Lynn	February 10, 1968
December 28, 1968	21 out of 50	"You've Just Stepped In (From Stepping Out on Me)"	Loretta Lynn	Don Trowbridge	June 1, 1968
December 27, 1969	22 out of 50	"Woman of the World (Leave My World Alone)"	Loretta Lynn	Sharon Higgins	January 27, 1969
December 27, 1969	36 out of 50	"That's a No No"	Lynn Anderson	Ben Peters	July 12, 1969

December 19, 1970	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 25, 1971	14 out of 50	"After the Fire Is Gone"	Loretta Lynn and Conway Twitty	L. E. White	January 16, 1971
December 30, 1972	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 29, 1973	26 out of 50	"Blood Red and Goin' Down"	Tanya Tucker	Curly Putman	June 29, 1973
December 28, 1974	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 27, 1975	28 out of 50	"When Will I Be Loved"	Linda Ronstadt	Phil Everly	March 25, 1975
December 25, 1976	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 24, 1977	26 out of 50	"Married But Not to Each Other"	Barbara Mandrell	Denise LaSalle, Frances H. Miller	March 1977
December 23, 1978	36 out of 50	"Woman to Woman"	Barbara Mandrell	James Banks, Eddie Marion, Henderson Thigpen	November 1977
December 22, 1979	19 out of 50	"(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right"	Barbara Mandrell	Homer Banks, Carl Hampton, Raymond Jackson	February 17, 1979
December 20, 1980	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 26, 1981	16 out of 50	"Who's Cheatin' Who"	Charly McClain	Jerry Hayes	August 1, 1980
December 25, 1982	2 out of 50	"Nobody"	Sylvia	Rhonda Kye Fleming, Dennis Morgan	June 5, 1982
December 24, 1983	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 22, 1984	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 28, 1985	0 out of 50	None	n/a	n/a	n/a

December 27, 1986	4 out of 50	"Have Mercy"	The Judds	Paul Kennerley	September 1985
December 27, 1986	8 out of 50	"Whoever's in New England"	Reba McEntire	Kendal Franceschi, Quentin Powers	March 2, 1986
December 26, 1987	9 out of 50	"The Way We Make a Broken Heart"	Rosanne Cash	John Hiatt	June 1987
December 24, 1988	0 out of 100	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 23, 1989	91 out of 100	"Change of Heart"	The Judds	Naomi Judd	October 17, 1988
December 22, 1990	56 out of 75	"Leave It Alone"	The Forester Sisters	Radney Foster, Bill Lloyd	November 25, 1989
December 21, 1991	17 out of 75	"Rumor Has It"	Reba McEntire	Bruce Burch, Vern Dant, Larry Shell	November 26, 1990
December 26, 1992	1 out of 75	"I Saw the Light"	Wynonna Judd	Andrew Gold, Lisa Angelle	May 4, 1992
December 26, 1992	41 out of 75	"Some Kind of Trouble"	Tanya Tucker	Mike Reid, Brent Maher, Don Potter	February 15, 1992
December 25, 1993	12 out of 75	"Blame It on Your Heart"	Patty Loveless	Harlan Howard, Kostas	April 3, 1993
December 25, 1993	40 out of 75	"Does He Love You"	Reba McEntire with Linda Davis	Sandy Knox, Billy Stritch	August 28, 1993
December 25, 1993	42 out of 75	"It's Your Call"	Reba McEntire	Bruce Burch, Shawna Harrington-Burkhart, Liz Hengber	May 18, 1993
December 25, 1993	74 out of 75	"Take It Back"	Reba McEntire	Kristy Jackson	October 1992
December 24, 1994	69 out of 75	"Life #9"	Martina McBride	Tony Perez, Kostas	January 3, 1994
December 23, 1995	0 out of 75	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 28, 1996	0 out of 75	None	n/a	n/a	n/a

December 27, 1997	35 out of 75	"She Drew a Broken Heart"	Patty Loveless	Jon McElroy, Ned McElroy	December 1, 1996
December 27, 1997	58 out of 75	"In Another's Eyes"	Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood	Garth Brooks, Bobby Wood, John Peppard	August 18, 1997
December 26, 1998	0 out of 75	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 25, 1999	0 out of 75	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 30, 2000	0 out of 75	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 29, 2001	44 out of 60	"When God-Fearin' Women Get the Blues"	Martina McBride	Leslie Satcher	June 25, 2001
December 28, 2002	47 out of 60	"Forgive"	Rebecca Lynn Howard	Rebecca Lynn Howard, Bruce Howard	May 6, 2002
December 27, 2003	0 out of 60	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 25, 2004	0 out of 60	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 24, 2005	0 out of 60	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 23, 2006	37 out of 60	"Before He Cheats"	Carrie Underwood	Josh Kear, Chris Tompkins	August 19, 2006
December 23, 2006	43 out of 60	"Cheatin'"	Sara Evans	Brett James, Don Schlitz	October 31, 2005
December 22, 2007	51 out of 60	"Before He Cheats"	Carrie Underwood	Josh Kear, Chris Tompkins	August 19, 2006
December 20, 2008	29 out of 60	"Should've Said No"	Taylor Swift	Taylor Swift	May 18, 2008
December 20, 2008	44 out of 60	"Stay"	Sugarland	Jennifer Nettles	September 10, 2007
December 19, 2009	0 out of 60	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 18, 2010	45 out of 60	"White Liar"	Miranda Lambert	Miranda Lambert, Natalie Hemby	August 17, 2009

December 18, 2010	56 out of 60	"Turn On the Radio"	Reba McEntire	Cherie Oakley, Mark Oakley, J. P. Twang	July 19, 2010
December 17, 2011	5 out of 100	"You Lie"	The Band Perry	Aaron Henningsen, Brian Henningsen, Clara Henningsen	January 18, 2011
December 17, 2011	59 out of 100	"From a Table Away"	Sunny Sweeney	Sunny Sweeney, Bob DiPiero, Karyn Rochelle	June 28, 2010
December 17, 2011	61 out of 100	"Turn On the Radio"	Reba McEntire	Cherie Oakley, Mark Oakley, J. P. Twang	July 19, 2010
December 17, 2011	75 out of 100	"Look It Up"	Ashton Shepherd	Angaleena Presley, Robert Ellis Orrall	January 3, 2011
December 22, 2012	90 out of 100	"My Heart Can't Tell You No"	Sara Evans	Simon Climie, Dennis Morgan	June 20, 2011
December 22, 2012	95 out of 100	"Ex-Old Man"	Kristen Kelly	Kristen Kelly, Paul Overstreet	April 30, 2012
December 21, 2013	29 out of 100	"Two Black Cadillacs"	Carrie Underwood	Carrie Underwood, Hillary Lindsey, Josh Kear	November 18, 2012
December 21, 2013	42 out of 100	"Tornado"	Little Big Town	Natalie Hemby, Delta Maid	October 1, 2012
December 21, 2013	52 out of 100	"Merry Go 'Round"	Kacey Musgraves	Kacey Musgraves, Shane McAnally, Josh Osborne	September 10, 2012
December 20, 2014	0 out of 100	None	n/a	n/a	n/a
December 19, 2015	0 out of 100	None	n/a	n/a	n/a