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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Girl in a Country Song: Gender Roles and Objectification of Women in Popular Country Music across 1990 to 2014

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Abstract Although content analyses have examined the portrayal of women in objectifying and demeaning ways in many forms of media, including several genres of music, little research has explored the portrayal of women in country music. The current study content analyzed the lyrics of 750 country songs popular in the United States across almost three decades (1990–2014) for their portrayal of female gender roles and objectification of women. Findings revealed that country songs from 2010 to 2014 were less likely to portray women in traditional roles, non-traditional roles, family roles, and as empowered than songs that were popular in the first half of one or both prior decades. Songs from 2010 to 2014 were also more likely to refer to a woman's appearance, to women in tight or revealing clothing, to women as objects, and to women via slang than songs in one or both prior decades. Furthermore, results indicate that the changes in the portrayal of women appear to be driven by changes in lyrics in songs sung by male artists, but not by those in songs sung by female artists. The present research helps to lay a foundation for future work exploring the relations between exposure to country music, female gender role stereotypes, and attitudes and behaviors related to objectification of women.

Keywords Music · Women · Objectification · Gender roles · Stereotypes

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Bein' the girl in a country song
How in the world did it go so wrong?
Like all we're good for
Is looking good for you and your friends on the weekend
Nothing more
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
And be the girl in a country song. – Maddie & Tae

The hit single "Girl in a Country Song," released in July 2014 by female artists Maddie & Tae, rose quickly to the top of Billboard's country chart in the United States (Trust and Jessen 2014). With catchy feminist lyrics emphasizing the discrepancies between the portrayal of men and women in country music, the song highlights a gap in existing research regarding the genre and its typical representations of women. Although country music is the top music genre for many Americans (Nielsen 2014; NPD 2013), most research that investigates the content of popular music explores less popular genres, possibly because country music is thought to be, and is marketed as, more wholesome than other genres (Abramson 2002; Toure 2014).

Content analyses of other media, including music, have found that rigid gender roles are often portrayed (Andsager and Roe 1999), prompting concern that such exposure could lead to outcomes such as a skewed sense of gender roles and adversarial relationships between men and women (Ward et al. 2005). In addition to such gender role portrayals, several music genres have been found to demean women by portraying them as sexual objects meant for men's pleasure (Vincent et al. 1987). The country music genre may be especially prone to objectifying women because it is male-dominated—in 2014 only 8 % of Billboard's charting singles were sung by women (Leight 2015). In

addition, some suggest that the portrayal of women in country music lyrics has changed over time—critics express concern that popular "bro country" music in recent years has begun to closely resemble pop and hip-hop music with its focus on beautiful, bikini-clad women and casual sex (Rosen 2013). Therefore, the first purpose of the present study is to explore country music lyrics to determine (a) how they portray female gender roles, (b) the prevalence of their portrayal of women as objectified, and (c) how those portrayals have changed over time (1990–2014).

Past research also suggests that the portrayal of women in country music songs may differ by the gender of the singer. Female singers tend to portray women in a more empowered light (van Oosten et al. 2015), possibly because female artists may use the platform of music to challenge traditional gender stereotypes (Roberts 1991). In addition, because country music is primarily male-owned and operated (Pruitt 2006), it is thought to be representative of male culture and concerns regarding the advancement of women and the "recuperation of hegemonic masculinity" (Lay 2000, p. 239). Therefore, the second purpose of our study is to explore (a) the differences in the portrayal of female gender roles and objectification of women based on the gender of the singer and (b) how these portrayals have changed over time (1990–2014) for singers of each gender. The present research helps to lay a foundation for future research addressing the relation between exposure to popular country music lyrics and the potential effects of such exposure on gender role stereotypes as well as attitudes and behaviors related to the objectification of women.

Popular Music in the United States

Listening to music is one of the most popular media activities among both young American adults and adolescents (Common Sense Media 2015; Rideout et al. 2010). Approximately 93 % of Americans say they actively choose to listen to music to the tune of more than 25 h per week (Nielsen 2015). American youth are no exception to avid music listening—teenagers listen to music for two or more hours on average in the typical day (Common Sense Media 2015; Rideout et al. 2010). Americans listen to music on a variety of platforms, including radio (including satellite radio), smartphones, iPods, tablets, computers, CDs, and even vinyl (Common Sense Media 2015; Nielsen 2015). More than 80 million people are active users of the music streaming service Pandora, and about 60 million actively use the music service Spotify (Pew 2014). In 2015 alone, Americans streamed 317 billion on-demand song tracks from online audio and video sources—172 billion of those were video streams, and about 145 billion (46 %) were audio streams (Nielsen 2016).

Country music is the most popular music genre (NPD 2013) and top radio format in the United States (Nielsen 2014). Country music is the most listened-to music format for those ages 18–49 years-old, the second most among those ages 50–64 years-old (Nielsen 2014), and is in the top three among teenagers (Country Music Association [CMA] 2014; NPD 2013). Since 2006, the audience of country music has increased by 17 %, and it now commands more than 15 % of all radio listening in the United States (Nielsen 2014). In 2015, country music accounted for 8.5 % of all music album sales in the United States (Morris 2016).

Female Gender Roles in the Media

A majority (52 %) of country music listeners are female (CMA 2014), yet most of the top country music songs in recent years have been sung by male singers (Leight 2015). This disparity has led to concerns among some industry watchdogs that women, both in the industry and in country music lyrics, are being marginalized (Caramanica 2015). One way that women are marginalized is through the portrayal of rigid female gender role stereotypes.

Individuals develop ideas about gender as early as young childhood (Yee and Brown 1994). Gender schema theory suggests that people develop schemas, or ideas about a gender and its attributes (Fiske and Taylor 1991) that guide their processing of information related to gender by observing models, including mediated representations of gender (Smith and Granados 2009). Social cognitive theory further suggests that people learn by observing either live or mediated models (Bandura 1986). Content analyses of popular media, including music, have found that rigid gender roles are often portrayed, leading to a host of attitudes and behaviors consistent with rigid gender role perceptions.

A broad base of research reveals that rigid gender role portrayals are common in the media. Media commonly portray women in traditional and submissive roles and rarely portray women in non-traditional roles. In their review of media gender role portrayal literature, Signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001) suggest that portrayals of women considered "traditional" include portrayals of women in traditionally female occupations or as a homemaker or housewife—women are often portrayed on television in roles such as secretaries, nurses, teachers, and household workers. Portrayals of women considered "non-traditional" include portrayals of women in traditionally male occupations—men are more often than women portrayed in occupations such as doctor, lawyer or construction worker, and single women are often portrayed in traditionally male jobs. Women are more likely to be depicted in family roles such as a parent or primary caregiver (Smith et al. 2013), and they are commonly depicted as less powerful than men are, as submissive, and as dependent on a man to solve her problems (Peirce 1997; Stabile 2009). Conversely, little research portrays women as equal to a

man, empowered or as capable of making decisions on her own. Certain women, such as Hispanic women, are also often characterized as naughty, distrustful, and devious (Benedict 1992; Merskin 2007).

Similar to the portrayal of women in other media, women are often portrayed in rigid gender roles in popular music. Most research involving music has explored the content of music videos. For example, rock music videos tend to present women as unintelligent and in traditional gender roles (Vincent et al. 1987). Women in music videos are often portrayed as submissive, whereas men are portrayed as dominant (Andsager and Roe 2003; Sommers-Flanagan et al. 1993). Content analyses of country music have explored the genre from a variety of perspectives, but few analyze the portrayal of female gender roles. For example, research explores the prevalence of references to assurances of fidelity in country music lyrics (Hobbs and Gallup 2011), instances of seeking revenge of sexual betrayal (Kurzban 2012), references to politics and ideology (Van Sickel 2005), the portrayal of aging and old age (Aday and Austin 2000), and the portrayal of substance use (Primack et al. 2008). Only a handful of studies, however, explore the portrayal of female gender roles in country music. For example, one study found that male characters in country music videos were more likely to be shown working than were female characters and that women were often portrayed in traditional roles—condescendingly and as less than equal to men (Andsager and Roe 1999). Although a 1976 study involving 45 in-depth interviews of Nashville songwriters found that songwriters tended to agree that women should never be maligned in any way in country music songs (Lewis 1976), a 1978 study concluded that women are presented as submissive towards and dependent on men (Freudiger and Almquist 1978).

Research suggests that the portrayal of female gender roles in country music may have changed over time. Between 1955 and 2005, women in country music were more likely to be portrayed as sexually and relationally empowered, and pursuing a non-traditional female gender role has become more acceptable (Pruitt 2006). No known research within the last decade, however, explored the portrayal of female gender roles in country music. In a call for music research to be situated within the time period in which it resides, Cooper (1999, p. 32) argued, "if popular lyrics are to provide clues to the nature of womanhood, they must be viewed over time." Others suggest that "popular music lyrics follow cultural trends, and lyrics chronicle new societal developments" (Dukes et al. 2003, p. 643). Therefore, our study seeks to understand how female gender roles are portrayed in contemporary country music. Thus the first research question we ask is: What is the prevalence of the portrayal of women in rigid gender roles in popular country music lyrics? (RQ 1).

Objectification of Women in the Media

In addition to portraying stereotypical female gender roles, American media also frequently objectify women. Objectification, also commonly called sexual objectification, "occurs whenever a person's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from his or her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing him or her" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, p. 175). Such objectification often occurs in media portrayals of women. A task force established by the American Psychological Association concluded that the sexual objectification of women occurs in every form of media (APA 2007). Scholars argue that sexual objectification of women by the media teaches women and girls to view themselves as objects to be evaluated by others, which can lead to self-objectification (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997), that is, the internalization by women of the media's emphasis on females' appearance rather than focusing on their own competence-based attributes. Self-objectification can also lead to outcomes such as negative feelings toward one's own body, anxiety about one's own physical safety, depression, and disordered eating (Calogero 2004; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Noll and Fredrickson 1998).

The objectification of women in media content takes multiple forms, foremost of which is a focus on females' physical appearance. Media consistently share the message that sexual attractiveness is extremely important, including references to women's body parts and behaviors related to women's appearance such as ogling (American Psychological Association [APA] 2007), as well as messages about what constitutes attractiveness (Levine and Murnen 2009), such as thinness (Harrison and Hefner 2006), hair color (Rich and Cash 1993), and skin tone (Baker 2005). Objectification also occurs in media depictions of women in tight or revealing clothing (Graff et al. 2013) and comparing women to or presenting them as inanimate objects (Morris and Goldenberg 2015). Media often objectify women by portraying the expectation that dominant men hit on, ask out, or catcall women, often because women dress provocatively (Gurung and Chrouser 2007; Kim et al. 2007). Women are often objectified by the use of nicknames or slang instead of their real names (Rodriguez 2007). Objectification in the media is also apparent by the absence of portrayals of females' competence-based attributes (Noll and Fredrickson 1998).

Music videos may provide the clearest example of objectification of women in the media (Aubrey and Frisby 2011). Research has consistently shown that women are portrayed as sex objects in music videos (Sommers-Flanagan et al. 1993). Chief among the objectifiers in music videos are videos in the rap/hip-hop genre, which often portray women as submissive to men (Baxter et al. 1985; Conrad et al. 2009). Women in music videos are also often objectified by being

portrayed in revealing clothing (Conrad et al. 2009). Female artists in music videos are often more sexually objectified than male artists are, male artists are more likely to ogle women, and female artists are more likely to adhere to rigid appearance standards than male artists are (Aubrey and Frisby 2011). In one study, among pop, R&B/hip-hop, and country music videos, country music videos were the least likely to objectify women, suggesting that country music videos tend to portray women in traditional gender roles (Aubrey and Frisby 2011).

Notably, most research exploring the objectification of women in music employs music videos, and not music lyrics, as the unit of analysis. Lyrics, however, are often a reflection of listeners' feelings and maintain the attention of those interested in certain types of music (for a review, see American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP] 2009). One recent study examined the lyrics of country music songs relative to other music genres and found that country music lyrics (from 2009 to 2013) objectify women less than R&B/hip-hop, rap, and pop, but more so than contemporary and rock music (Flynn et al. 2016). The present study expands on previous work by exploring the objectification of women in country music lyrics from a larger sample of country music songs from parts of multiple decades. Therefore, we proposed our second research question: What is the prevalence of the objectification of women in popular country music lyrics? (RQ 2).

Singers' Gender

Past research suggests that we may expect male and female lead singers to portray female gender roles in different ways. For example, a content analysis of MTV music videos found that female singers were more likely to enact subordinate nonverbal behaviors than male singers did and that male singers were more likely to behave aggressively than female singers were (Wallis 2011). In another study female singers were more likely to portray women as active and assertive than male singers were, suggesting that women are more apt to portray themselves as the dominant partner in a romantic relationship (Wilson 2000). Other research found that female adolescents were more likely to accept female token sexual resistance (the idea that women say "no" when they actually mean "yes") when they are exposed to sexual music videos by male artists, but not to those by female artists, suggesting that music by female artists depicts women as more empowered than does music by male artists (van Oosten et al. 2015). It appears that women singers, at least in music videos, tend to portray themselves in a more empowered light, possibly because female artists may use the platform of music to challenge traditional gender stereotypes (Roberts 1991).

Only one study of which we are aware examined differences in the portrayal of women in country music videos based on singers' gender. Andsager and Roe (1999) found that female country artists generally portrayed women as equal to men in their music videos, whereas male country artists tended to depict women condescendingly or in traditional roles. Their study also found that women in country music videos were more likely than were men to be portrayed in revealing clothing.

Reasons for the disparate portrayal of women by male and female singers may be explained by the nature of the country music industry. In a qualitative historical review of country music, Pruitt (2006) argued that country music is primarily male-owned and male-operated, even though women are the principal listeners of the genre. In other words, country music is thought to be representative of dominant White male heterosexist culture, and because sexual objectification of women is theorized to be a product of male-dominated cultural ideals, country music is likely to contain objectifying content (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Some scholars suggest that sexually objectifying popular music written and produced by men in recent decades is evidence of a backlash against feminism and the cultural progress that women have made. Lay (2000) argues that men use popular music to reassert their traditional dominance in the face of advancement of women and gays. The argument that objectifying media portrayals are due to an attempt to rejuvenate hegemonic masculinity is especially fitting for a genre that is produced by, and thought to be catering to, the traditional White heterosexual male. If principles of objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1992) are applied, it is logical to conclude that country music likely contains sexually objectifying portrayals of women, especially in music sung by male singers.

Based on results from past research, and based on the principles of objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997) and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1992), we expect country music lyrics to differ in their portrayal of female gender roles and objectification of women based on the singer's gender. Therefore, we propose two hypotheses: (a) lyrics in songs sung by male singers will be more likely to portray women in rigid gender roles than lyrics in songs sung by female singers (Hypothesis 1) and (b) lyrics in songs sung by male singers will be more likely to objectify women than lyrics in songs sung by female singers (Hypothesis 2).

Changes over Time

Some music critics suggest that the lyrics of contemporary country music are different than in past decades. As previously mentioned, Rosen (2013) categorized today's country music as "bro country," which has been defined as "a bunch of guys singing about trucks, headlights, rolled-down windows, jeans, alcohol, moonlit makeouts, and sex on river beds beside old dirt roads" (Smith 2013, para 5) that also includes "'girl' as a

term of address (to women who presumably have names)" (Smith 2013, para 5). One of country music's biggest stars, Kenny Chesney, laments that bro country suggests that if women don't "wear cut-off jeans or a bikini top, or sit on a tailgate and drink, then you really weren't worthy" (Carlson 2014, para 6).

Research also suggests that music lyrics in general have changed over time. For example, a content analysis of Billboard's top 10 most popular songs from each year between 1980 and 2007 revealed that lyrics have become more self-focused, more socially disconnected, more angry, more negative, and more antisocial over time (DeWall et al. 2011). Violence in rap music increased between 1979 and 1997 (Herd 2009). And between 1976 and 1998, male artists became more likely to use sexual references in lyrics (Dukes et al. 2003). A content analysis of the 1967–2009 covers of Rolling Stone magazine, a magazine largely devoted to popular music, shows that women are increasingly portrayed as sexualized and "hypersexualized." And, as previously mentioned, females in country music were more likely to be portrayed as empowered in 2005 than they were in 1955 (Pruitt 2006).

Unfortunately, little empirical research explores the changing nature of country music as a genre. Popular press sources and country music artists themselves, however, suggest that country music has experienced several distinct shifts in the past several decades. In their song "Girl in a Country Song," singers Maddie and Tae referred to the changing nature of country music lyrics and the increasingly objectifying portrayal of women by lamenting that "Conway and George Strait never did it this way back in the old days" (Marlow et al. 2015). They are referring to country legends Conway Twitty and George Strait who are the only two country artists with more than 40 number one hits (Billboard 2016a). Twitty's career ended abruptly with his death in 1993, just after "his success began to slip off in the early '90s, once new country forced older performers off the top of the charts" (Billboard 2016a, para 6). Strait is credited with having stayed true to "traditional country" (Billboard 2016b, para 1) despite the "generational shift of the early '90s" (para 2).

That generational shift appears to have occurred during the first half of the 1990s when country music transitioned from its "neo-traditional era" into the "arena" era, a shift largely driven by the music of Garth Brooks (Country Weekly 2014). During this time, the market share of country music nearly doubled (Campbell 2012). Country music went through another upheaval during the first several years of the 2000s, when country music diversified with the inclusion of attributes of the pop music genre (Country Weekly 2014; Pecknold 2012), punctuated by the recording of "Murder on Music Row" by Strait and fellow country singer Alan Jackson, a song which protested country music's crossover into the pop genre (Gray 2000; Morris 2003). Finally, the bro-country movement is thought to have begun in the few years preceding the release of Florida Georgia Line's "Cruise," (Rosen 2013), and is thought to have started to decline around 2015 (Stark 2015). Based on the preceding commentary, we expect to find differences in country music's portrayal of female gender roles and the objectification of women between the first half of the 2010s and those at other transition periods in the recent history of country music.

Therefore, we proposed two additional hypotheses: (a) lyrics in country music songs from the early 2010s will be more likely to portray women in rigid gender roles than lyrics in songs from the early 2000s and early 1990s (Hypothesis 3) and (b) lyrics in country songs from the early 2010s will be more likely to objectify women than lyrics in country songs from the early 2000s and early 1990s (Hypothesis 4). Furthermore, by combining previous hypotheses about the differences in country music lyrics by singer's gender and by decade, we predict that (c) lyrics in country music songs from the early 2010s sung by men, but by not women, will be more likely to portray women in rigid gender roles (Hypothesis 5a) and to objectify women (Hypothesis 5b) than lyrics in country songs from the early 2000s and early 1990s.

Method

The present sample was obtained from the Billboard yearly Top Country Hits list. The sample consisted of the top 50 songs (n = 750) for each of the first 5 years in each decade, that is, 1990–1994 (decade 1), 2000–2004 (decade 2), and 2010–2014 (decade 3). The transcript of each song was obtained from metrolyrics.com, similar to past content analyses and experiments involving music lyrics in various domains (Carpenter and Walters 2011; Fung et al. 2013; Sanchez et al. 2013). When lyrics were not found at metrolyrics.com, they were found at either songlyrics.com or cowboylyrics.com. These websites include collections of lyrics submitted by music fans, and they have been used in past content analyses of country music lyrics—researchers have analyzed the lyrics in past research to ensure that they are accurate lyric collections (Paul and Huron 2010).

Coding Procedures

Two investigators met weekly over a period of several months to discuss the coding categories, identify representative examples of each mutually exclusive category, and to discuss disagreements on practice songs from years not included in the sample of the current study. The two investigators also participated in the coding of the final sample. The unit of analysis was a single song, and coders noted the presence or absence of certain content in each song. Coders identified whether or not the lyrics in each song referred to a woman, the gender of each

song's singer, and exemplars of rigid female gender roles and objectification of women (see Table 1). To obtain reliability, each coder coded five randomly selected songs from each year in the sample (10 % from each year), and intercoder reliability for each category was calculated using Cohen's kappa (reported in Table 1). After achieving reliability, each coder coded an equal number of randomly selected songs from each year for the remainder of the sample.

Song Descriptives

Each song was first analyzed to determine whether or not the lyrics referred in any way to a woman. Approximately 91 % of songs contained a reference to a woman (n = 684). The remaining 66 songs were excluded from further analyses. Of the songs that referred to a woman, 532 (78 %) had a male lead vocalist, 139 (20 %) had a female lead vocalist, and 13 (2 %) had both a male and female lead. These 13 songs were also removed from the analyses because the research questions related to singers' gender only address comparison between one or the other gender, not both. The final sample size, then, consisted of 671 songs that contained a reference to a woman and that were sung by either a male or a female lead singer; unless otherwise noted, all subsequent analyses were conducted using these 671 songs. Six unique categories were coded to represent portrayals of female gender roles, and six unique categories were coded to represent objectifying portrayals of women (see Table 1 for a description of each category).

Results

Exploration of the Two Research Questions

The first research question asked about the prevalence of the portrayal of women in rigid gender roles in country music lyrics. Nearly half (44.6 %, n = 299) of songs referred in some way to female gender roles. Approximately 9.7 % (n = 65) of songs included a reference to a woman in a traditional role, and references to a woman in a family role occurred in 23.8 % (n = 160) of songs. References to a woman being dependent upon a man occurred in 7.6 % (n = 51) of songs, and references to a woman being empowered occurred in 6.7 % (n = 45) of songs. Approximately 3.3 % (n = 22) of songs included a reference to a woman in a non-traditional role, and references to a woman as distrustful or as a cheater occurred in 10.6 % (n = 71) of songs.

The second research question asked about the prevalence of the objectification of women in country music lyrics. More than half (57.7 %, n = 387) of the songs contained objectifying lyrics. Approximately 28.0 % (n = 188) included a reference to a woman's appearance, 7.0 % (n = 47) contained a reference to a woman wearing tight or revealing clothing, 8.0 % (n = 54) contained a reference to a woman as an inanimate or tangible object, 36.5 % (n = 245) used slang when referring to a woman, 3.6 % (n = 24) contained references to a woman being hit on [sexually propositioned], and 6.4 % (n = 43) had references to a woman's positive attributes.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 predicted that lyrics in country songs with male lead singers would be more likely to portray women in rigid gender roles than would lyrics in country songs sung by female singers. One-sided Chi-square tests of association revealed several significant differences (see Table 2). Lyrics in songs sung by male singers were less likely to refer to a woman being empowered, $\chi^2(1) = 40.34$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .25$), to women as being dependent on a man, $\chi^2(1) = 14.07$, $p < .001$, $V = .15$, and to women as distrustful or cheating, $\chi^2(1) = 6.59$, $p = .01$, $V = .10$, than were lyrics in songs sung by female singers. No significant differences between singers' gender were found in the likelihood of referring to a woman in a traditional role, $\chi^2(1) = .30$, $p = .43$, $V = .01$, to a woman in a family role, $\chi^2(1) = .74$, $p = .20$, $V = .03$, and to women in non-traditional roles, $\chi^2(1) = 1.71$, $p = .10$, $V = .05$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was only partially supported—lyrics in songs sung by male singers were less likely to portray women as empowered than lyrics in songs sung by female singers. Contrary to predictions, lyrics in songs sung by male singers were less likely to portray women as dependent on a man and as distrustful or cheating than lyrics in songs sung by female singers. In other words, lyrics in songs sung by female singers were more likely to portray women in some rigid gender roles, but were also more likely to portray women as empowered.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that lyrics in country songs sung by male singers would be more likely than lyrics in songs sung by female singers to objectify women. One-sided Chi-square tests of association revealed two significant differences (see Table 2). Lyrics in songs sung by male singers were more likely to refer to a woman's appearance, $\chi^2(1) = 10.05$, $p = .001$, $V = .12$, and to a woman using slang, $\chi^2(1) = 56.88$, $p < .001$, $V = .29$, than were lyrics in songs sung by female singers. No significant differences were found between singers' gender in the likelihood of referring a woman in tight or revealing clothing, $\chi^2(1) = .42$, $p = .26$, $V = .03$, as an inanimate or tangible object, $\chi^2(1) = 1.25$, $p = .13$, $V = .04$, to a woman being hit on, $\chi^2(1) = .00$, $p = .49$, $V = .00$, or to a woman's positive attributes, $\chi^2(1) = 2.31$, $p = .06$, $V = .06$. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 received partial support: Lyrics in country songs sung by male singers were more likely to refer to a woman's appearance and to refer to a woman using slang than lyrics in country songs sung by female singers.

Table 1 Codebook for portrayal of female gender roles and objectification of women in country music lyrics

Category	Description	Examples	Cohen's kappa
Refer to woman	Does the song refer to a woman in any way? For songs sung by female singers, referring to herself is a reference to a woman. Includes nouns and pronouns, names (formal and slang). Also includes mentions of "we" or other pronouns suggesting inclusion of more than one person in songs sung by men when referring to a romantic relationship.		1.0
Singer's gender	Gender of lead singer of the song. If the song has both a male and female lead singer, code as both.		1.0
A woman in a traditional role	References to a woman in a traditionally "female" occupation. References to a woman as NOT the breadwinner, but more so as nurturer or stay-at home mom. Explicit acts of nurturing or nurturing activities. References to a woman as participating in housekeeping activities, or that her place is in the home or kitchen. Also includes women being told to be a lady or to be traditional.	- "waitress, ""hairdresser," "teacher," "nurse" - "mama stayed home taking care of the kids," helping calm fears, supporting a husband, rocking the baby to sleep at night. - "cornbread in mama's kitchen"	.80
A woman in a family role	References to a woman as a wife, mother, sister, daughter, etc.	- "mama," "wife," "sister"	.94
A woman in a non-traditional role	References to a woman as single mothers. References to a woman in a traditionally "male" occupation or as the sole breadwinner. References to a woman with non-traditional skills, hobbies, interests, or behaviors, including "male" sports. Girls being good at "male" things. Breaking female stereotypes. Being or doing non-feminine things or breaking feminine stereotypes.	- she raised them kids all alone - "single mom, working two jobs" - "doctor," "lawyer" - An interest in or ability to fix cars. Women driving trucks, women driving while men ride in car.	.85
A woman being empowered	References to a woman as independent, confident, equal to a man, making her own choices, thinking on her own, asserting herself. References to gender equality. A woman being assertive or strong in her choices. Sticking up for herself.	- "she's a real woman, not a doormat for you" - "I think I'm right, I think you're wrong"	.84
A woman being dependent on a man	References to a woman who is financially or physically dependent on a man, or the message that the man is in charge or knows what's best for the woman, or that men can solve a problem that women can't. Explicit mentions of a man filling an emotional need. If references to earning money refer to "we" earn money, then it is not coded.	- "I didn't get a raise in pay today and I know how much she wanted the dress in Baker's window and it breaks my heart to see her have to wait" " I'm tired of you spending every dime I make to finance this way of life I've learned to hate" - "I need you."	1.0
A woman as distrustful or identified as a cheater	References to a woman that men can't trust, who cheats in a relationship, who is "crazy" or a "bad girl" or who engages in backstabbing, lying, breaking rules, sneaking around, or using a guy. Does not include references to risky behaviors unless accompanied by deceit or rule breaking. Includes "we" when one of the people contained in "we" is female. Also includes references to breaking the law. Does not include simply being mean or mad. Includes references to females being or acting "wild."	- "crazy" - "wild" - breaking the law - "trying not to get caught"	.82
A woman's appearance	Mentions of female body parts and/or how she looks. Does not include references to clothing and body parts that don't refer to how a woman looks. Does include references to	- "Slide that sugar shaker over here" - "Silver buckle hangin' off her hips" - hair, lips, legs, face, arms, feet, etc. - "I watch you in the fluorescent glare"	.97

Table 1 (continued)

Category	Description	Examples	Cohen's kappa
	body parts accompanied by an appearance-related adjective or referred to using slang. Includes mentions or allusions to "checking out" a woman. Includes compliments or reminiscences about a woman's appearance.	- "You're looking so good"	
A woman wearing tight and/or revealing clothing	Mentions of a woman wearing tight and/or revealing clothing. Also includes references to no clothing, taking off clothing, or clothing that is too small.	- "that bikini top" - "She's got them blue jeans painted on tight" - "…in what's left of those blue jeans"	.88
A woman as an inanimate or tangible object	Any explicit comparison or reference to a woman as an inanimate or tangible object. Any reference comparing a woman to an inhuman object, whether alive, dead, or inanimate. Includes metaphors and similes. Includes comparisons of body parts to such objects. Includes comparison to natural phenomenon. Labeling a woman as an inhuman object. Can be non-specific, such as "thing" or "possession." Includes appearance-related metaphors. Can refer to multiple women. Does not refer to women's actions as objects, such as "you move like a butterfly" or "you sing like a bird." Does not include "angel."	- "my sweet Georgia peach" - "I'm a tornado" - "my glass of wine" - "she is like rain" - "she's a scarlet letter" - "your body is like an hourglass" - "a field full of daisy dukes"	.85
Slang when describing a woman	Referring to a woman using words other than her name or title. Includes pet names and nicknames. Does not included appearance-related nicknames, such as "beautiful."	- "girl" - "honey" - "baby"	.79
A woman being hit on	A man and a woman who did not know each other (initial encounters) where the man makes advances toward the woman. Do not code this if the "being hit on" or advances occur when the two people already know each other (i.e. husband/wife; boyfriend/girlfriend). Includes unsolicited sexual advances between strangers in their first encounter. If unclear, ask yourself if the statement could be referring to people who already know each other.	- "hey baby" - "hey girl, you make me wanna drive you home"	.85
A woman's positive attributes	References to a woman's qualities, characteristics or uniqueness besides her appearance or what she provides physically. Positive adjectives about a woman. Includes metaphors to related non-objects, such as "answer to my prayers." Includes statements saying she lacks negative qualities.	- "every bit as funny as she is smart" - "she's the answer to their prayers" - "one of a kind" - "ain't one thing about her fake"	1.0

Hypothesis 3 predicted that lyrics in country songs in the early 2010s would be more likely to portray women in rigid gender roles than those in country songs in the early 2000s and early 1990s. Approximately 33 % of songs came from the years 1990–1994 (n = 221), 34 % came from 2000 to 2004 (n = 230), and 33 % came from 2010 to 2014 (n = 220). A one-way ANOVA failed to reveal that women were more likely to be mentioned in one decade over another, $F(2747) = 1.32$, $p = .27$, $\eta p^2 = .00$. A one-way ANOVA also failed to reveal significant differences in the number of songs sung by each gender in each of the three study decades $F(2668) = 1.19$, $p = .31$, $\eta p^2 = .00$, suggesting that any differences in outcomes are not due to a change in the proportion of songs sung by each gender.

Next, Chi-square tests of association were conducted to determine if any significant differences were present among decades, followed by a post-hoc test that adjusts the p-value using the Bonferroni method to control for Type I error—the same tests were used in all subsequent analyses when comparing differences among decades. Where a cell count in one of the decades under comparison was less than 5, significance was tested by using Fisher's Exact test. Multiple significant

Table 2 Differences in the portrayal of women in country music by male and female singers

Portrayals	Male singers		Female singers	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Female gender roles				
Traditional role	9.6_a	51	10.1_a	14
Non-traditional role	2.8_a	15	5.0_a	7
Family role	23.1_a	123	26.6_a	37
Empowered	3.6_a	19	18.7_b	26
Dependent on a man	5.6_a	30	15.1_b	21
Distrustful/cheater	9.0_a	48	16.5_b	23
Objectification				
Appearance	30.8_a	164	17.3_b	24
Tight clothing	7.3_a	39	5.8_a	8
Women as object	8.6_a	46	5.8_a	8
Slang	43.6_a	232	9.4_b	13
Hit on	3.6_a	19	3.6_a	5
Positive attributes	7.1_a	38	3.6_a	5

Songs that do not refer to women and that are sung jointly by a male and female singer are excluded ($n = 671$). Percentages with shared subscripts across a row do not differ significantly ($p \geq .05$, one-sided)

differences were found for female gender roles (see Table 3). References to women in traditional roles differed by decade, $\chi^2(2) = 7.77$, $p = .02$, $V = .11$: Lyrics in country songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women in a traditional role than were songs in the 2000s. References to women in a family role also differed by decade $\chi^2(2) = 16.53$, $p < .001$, $V = .16$: Lyrics in country songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women in a family role than were songs in the 2000s. References to women in non-traditional roles differed by decade, $FE = 15.21$, $p < .001$, $V = .15$: Lyrics in country songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women in a non-traditional role than were songs in the 2000s. References to women as empowered differed significantly by decade, $\chi^2(2) = 7.65$, $p = .02$, $V = .11$: Lyrics from country songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women as empowered than those in country songs in the 1990s. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 received partial support. Lyrics in songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women in non-traditional roles than were those in the 2000s and as empowered than were songs in the 1990s. Contrary to predictions, lyrics in country songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women in traditional roles and family roles.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that lyrics in more recent country songs would objectify women more than those in songs in previous decades. Several significant differences were found (see Table 3). References to a woman's appearance differed by decade, $\chi^2(2) = 46.92$, $p < .001$, $V = .26$: Lyrics in songs in the 2010s were more likely to refer to a woman's appearance than did songs in the 2000s and the 1990s. References to women in tight or revealing clothing differed by decade, $FE = 34.15$, $p < .001$, $V = .23$: Lyrics in songs in the 2010s were more likely to refer to women in tight or revealing clothing than did songs in the 2000s and the 1990s. References to women as objects differed by decade, $\chi^2(2) = 14.38$, $p = .001$, $V = .15$: Lyrics in songs in the 2010s and the 1990s were more likely to refer to women as objects than were songs in the 2000s. References to women using slang differed by decade, $\chi^2(2) = 22.51$, $p < .001$, $V = .18$: Lyrics in songs in the 2010s were more likely to refer to a woman using slang than did songs in the 2000s and 1990s. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was largely supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that lyrics in country songs sung by male singers in the early 2010s, but not those in songs sung by female singers, would be more likely (a) to portray women in rigid gender roles and (b) to objectify women than lyrics in songs in previous decades. Among male singers, differences were found in references to women in a family role by decade, $\chi^2(2) = 18.49$, $p < .001$, $V = .19$: Lyrics in country songs sung by male singers in the 2010s and 1990s were less likely to refer to women in family roles than were songs in the 2000s. Also among male singers, references to women in non-traditional roles differed by decade, $FE = 11.86$, $p = .004$, $V = .15$: Lyrics in country songs sung by male singers in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women in a non-traditional role than were songs in the 2000s. References to women as dependent on a man also differed by decade among male singers, $FE = 5.97$, $p = .03$, $V = .11$: Lyrics in songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women as dependent on a man than were songs in the 2000s and the 1990s. Among female singers, differences by decade were found in references to women in traditional roles, $FE = 10.08$, $p = .009$, $V = .27$: Lyrics in songs in the 2000s were more likely to refer to women in traditional roles than were songs in the 1990s. Also among female singers, differences by decade were found in references to women as distrustful or cheating, $FE = 6.99$, $p = .03$, $V = .22$: Lyrics in songs in the 2010s were more likely to refer to women as distrustful or cheating than were songs in the 2000s. Therefore, Hypothesis 5a was partially supported.

Among male singers, differences were found between several categories representing objectification of women (see Table 4). Differences were found in references to women's appearance by decade, $\chi^2(2) = 46.98$, $p < .001$, $V = .30$: Lyrics in country songs sung by male singers in the 2010s were more likely to refer to women's appearance than were songs in the 2000s and the 1990s. Among male singers, differences in references to women in tight or revealing clothing by decade were also found, $FE = 36.98$, $p < .001$, $V = .26$: Lyrics in country songs sung by men in the 2010s were more likely to refer to women in tight or revealing clothing than were songs in the 2000s and the 1990s, and lyrics in songs in the 2000s were more likely to refer to women in tight or revealing clothing than were songs in the 1990s. Differences in references to

Table 3 Differences in the portrayal of women in country music over time

Portrayals	Decade 1 (1990s)		Decade 2 (2000s)		Decade 3 (2010–2014)	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Female gender roles						
Traditional role	8.6_{ab}	19	13.9_{b}	32	6.4_{a}	14
Non-traditional role	1.8_{a}	4	7.0_{b}	16	1.0_{a}	2
Family role	18.1_{a}	40	33.0_{b}	76	20.0_{a}	44
Empowered	10.4_{a}	23	5.7_{ab}	13	4.1_{b}	9
Dependent on a man	7.7_{a}	17	10.4_{a}	24	4.5_{a}	10
Distrustful/cheater	11.8_{a}	26	7.0_{a}	16	13.2_{a}	29
Objectification						
Appearance	19.0_{a}	42	20.4_{a}	47	45.0_{b}	99
Tight clothing	1.4_{a}	3	4.8_{a}	11	15.0_{b}	33
Women as object	8.6_{a}	19	3.0_{b}	7	12.7_{a}	28
Slang	29.4_{a}	65	31.3_{a}	72	49.1_{b}	108
Hit on	3.6_{a}	8	2.2_{a}	5	5.0_{a}	11
Positive attributes	7.2_{a}	16	4.8_{a}	11	7.3_{a}	16

Songs that do not refer to women and that are sung jointly by a male and female singer are excluded ($n = 671$). Percentages with shared subscripts across a row do not differ significantly ($p \geq .05$, two-sided). Two-sided Chi-square tests were employed instead of one-sided tests when comparing decades because in crosstabulations of tables larger than 2 × 2, a hypothesis about associations cannot be "tested directionally because of the way that the Chi-square statistic quantifies departure from independence" (Hayes 2005, p. 262)

women as objects by decade were also found, $FE = 14.49$, $p = .001$, $V = .17$: Lyrics in songs in the 2010s and the 1990s were more likely to refer to women as objects than were songs in the 2000s. Differences in referring to a woman using slang by decade were found, $\chi^2(2) = 22.73$, $p < .001$, $V = .21$: Lyrics in country songs sung by male singers in the 2010s were more likely to refer to women using slang than were songs in the 2000s and the 1990s. No differences among decades were

Table 4 Differences in the portrayal of women in country music by gender over time

Portrayals	Male singers						Female singers					
	Decade 1 (1990s)		Decade 2 (2000s)		Decade 3 (2010s)		Decade 1 (1990s)		Decade 2 (2000s)		Decade 3 (2010s)	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Female gender roles												
Traditional role	10.2_{a}	18	12.0_{a}	21	6.7_{a}	12	2.3_{a}	1	20.0_{b}	11	5.0_{ab}	2
Non-traditional role	1.7_{ab}	3	6.3_{b}	11	$.6_{a}$	1	2.3_{a}	1	9.1_{a}	5	2.5_{a}	1
Family role	18.6_{a}	33	34.3_{b}	60	16.7_{a}	30	2.3_{a}	1	9.1_{a}	5	2.5_{a}	1
Empowered	5.6_{a}	10	4.0_{a}	7	1.1_{a}	2	15.9_{a}	7	29.1_{a}	16	35.0_{a}	14
Dependent on a man	7.3_{a}	13	7.4_{a}	13	2.2_{b}	4	29.5_{a}	13	10.9_{a}	6	17.5_{a}	7
Distrustful/cheater	10.2_{a}	18	6.9_{a}	12	10.0_{a}	18	18.2_{ab}	8	7.3_{b}	4	27.5_{a}	11
Objectification												
Appearance	20.3_{a}	36	21.7_{a}	38	50.0_{b}	90	13.6_{a}	6	16.4_{a}	9	22.5_{a}	9
Tight clothing	$.6_{c}$	1	4.6_{a}	8	16.7_{b}	30	4.5_{a}	2	5.5_{a}	3	7.5_{a}	3
Women as object	10.2_{a}	18	2.3_{b}	4	13.3_{a}	24	2.3_{a}	1	5.5_{a}	3	10.0_{a}	4
Slang	34.5_{a}	61	38.3_{a}	67	57.8_{b}	104	9.1_{a}	4	9.1_{a}	5	10.0_{a}	4
Hit on	2.8_{a}	5	2.3_{a}	4	5.6_{a}	10	6.8_{a}	3	1.8_{a}	1	2.5_{a}	1
Positive attributes	8.5_{a}	15	4.6_{a}	8	8.3_{a}	15	2.3_{a}	1	5.5_{a}	3	2.5_{a}	1

Songs that do not refer to women and that are sung jointly by a male and female singer are excluded ($n = 671$). Percentages with shared subscripts across a row and within singers' gender do not differ significantly ($p \geq .05$, two-sided)

found in the objectification of women in lyrics in country songs sung by female singers. Therefore, Hypothesis 5b was largely supported.

Discussion

The present study explored the portrayal of women in rigid gender roles and the objectification of women in popular country music lyrics. Findings suggest that most country songs, popular in the United States, refer to women in some way—just less than half refer to female gender roles in some way, and more than half objectify women in some way. Furthermore, lyrics in songs sung by male singers differed from those in songs sung by female singers. Lyrics in country songs with male singers were less likely to portray women as empowered, as dependent on a man, and as distrustful or cheating, and they were more likely to refer to a women's appearance and to a woman using slang. Effect sizes for significant findings in the study ranged from small to moderate.

In addition, lyrics in country music songs in the early 2010s differed from those in country songs in the early 2000s and early 1990s. Lyrics in songs in the 2010s were less likely to refer to women in some types of less rigid gender roles, including being portrayed as empowered than in the early 1990s and in non-traditional roles than in the early 2000s. The same songs were also less likely to refer to women in the rigid family role than in the 2000s. More recent songs were also more likely to objectify women—lyrics in songs in the early 2010s referred more to a woman's appearance, to women in tight or revealing clothing, to women as objects, and using slang. It should be noted that changes in lyrics were not a linear trend (see Table 3). For example, songs in the early 2000s were more likely to refer to women in a family role than songs in both the early 1990s and the early 2010s. Similarly, songs in the early 2010s and early 1990s were both more likely to refer to women as objects than songs in the 2000s. These findings suggest that changes in country music lyrics do not appear to have changed incrementally. In other words, lyrics in each of the different decades do not appear to have portrayed women in increasingly rigid gender roles or as more objectified than in the decade immediately preceding it, suggesting that that each new era in country music may be distinct in its own right, each representing cultural trends and societal development unique to its respective era (Dukes et al. 2003).

The decline in references to women in family roles between the early 2000s and early 2010s was due to changes in lyrics in songs sung by male singers, but not by those in songs sung by female singers. In addition, changes in the objectification of women in country music lyrics over time appear to be driven largely by changes in lyrics in songs sung by male singers, but not in those sung by female singers. Lyrics in songs sung by male singers were more likely in the 2010s to objectify women in a variety of ways than were those in previous decades, but the same changes in lyrics were not found in country songs sung by female singers, with just one exception: Lyrics in songs sung by female singers, but not male singers, in the 2010s were more likely to refer to women as distrustful or cheaters than were songs in the 2000s.

These findings indicate that the most recent era of country music—"bro country"—may be more than an anecdotal phenomenon, and that the balance of power in country music may indeed have "tipped from an older generation of male country stars to the 'bros'" (Rosen 2013, para 4), especially relative to the objectification of women. The current study provides empirical support for this argument, as well as for the lyrics in Maddie & Tae's "Girl In A Country Song" decrying that that women in country music lyrics "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, and be the girl in a country song" (Marlow et al. 2015). In other words, findings of our study suggest that to be a female in a country song in the 2010s is to be objectified more than in the past.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with all research, our study has some limitations. First, the coders for the study were limited to the primary author and co-author, leading to a concern about coding bias. The study did, however, employ at least two coders to obtain reliability for each category in a random sub-sample in order to ensure that the "obtained ratings are not the idiosyncratic results of the one rater's subjective judgment" (Tinsley and Weiss 1975, p. 359). Coders were also unaware of the coding of the other—both during the coding of the subsample and of the complete sample. Regardless, future research with a wider variety of coders should seek to further establish the reliability of the codebook.

In addition, our study was limited to analyzing the content of popular country music lyrics; exploring the effects of the lyrics was outside the scope of our study. Although we made suppositions about the effects of objectifying and rigid gender stereotyping found in the lyrics of country music based on the tenets and past research related to objectification theory, gender schema theory, and social cognitive theory, as well as similar research in other music genres, future research should empirically investigate the role of exposure to popular country music lyrics on listeners' attitudes and behaviors related to female gender roles and objectification of women. For example, gender schema theory and social cognitive theory would suggest that individuals exposed to heavy amounts of country music in the early 2010s would fail to learn that women can assume empowering and non-traditional roles in relation to men due to the lack of such portrayals in country music. In addition, objectification theory would suggest that heavy

listeners of country music may adopt attitudes consistent with valuing females' appearance, flaunting that appearance with tight and revealing clothing, supporting the notion that women should be called slang names other than their given name, and believing that their bodies are commodities to be used and displayed. Future research should investigate these possibilities.

Although our study analyzed the lyrics of a large number of popular country songs, the songs were limited to the first 5 years of three recent decades; thus, the study's conclusions should not be considered representative of the entirety of each decade. It should also be noted that comparisons between decades in some coding categories could not be made because both decades contained fewer than five references to the coding category. Future research should continue to explore the content of country music lyrics and the differences in lyrics over time, based on changes to the genre from the influence of culture, industry economics, singers' gender, listenership, and new technologies. It is also possible that the effects of exposure to country music lyrics are affected by the social context in which they are consumed (e.g., with a friend)—future research should seek to understand the social variables that may influence the effects of listening to country music.

Practice Implications

Cooper (1985) argued it is possible that music lyrics are a force with the ability to persuade and socialize; thus, results of the current study have implications for socialization, especially that of U.S. youth. Youth use music in a variety of ways, including managing their moods and achieving group identity, and listening to music can have an effect on youths' risk-taking behaviors, negative emotions, and mental health outcomes (for a review, see AAP 2009). The portrayal of women in music can also influence stereotyped and aggressive perceptions of women (Fischer and Greitemeyer 2006; Roberts and Christensen 2001). Because youth listen to music for more than 2 h a day on average (Rideout et al. 2010), and because country music is so popular among U.S. youth (CMA 2014), it is essential that parents, pediatricians, and others involved with maintaining youths' well-being be aware of the content of country music and the potential role that it could play in the socialization of adolescents.

Country music has traditionally been considered a more wholesome genre of music than other genres, such as pop, rap and hip/hop. Results of our study suggest that the content of current country music has changed to more closely mirror content in other music genres—thus, music fans today may have trouble escaping the consistent, ubiquitous message found in music and other forms of media that women are to be valued for their appearance and their sexual desirability more so than for their skills or other competence-based attributes. Those involved with the production and distribution of country music should evaluate the direction of the country music genre relative to its portrayal of women in order to ensure that the genre makes progress towards portraying women in less rigid gender roles, as less objectified, and as placing more value on women's competence and intelligence.

Conclusions

In summary, our study found that lyrics in contemporary, popular country music tend to portray women in family roles, yet also as objectified. Furthermore, findings indicate that country music in the 2010s tends to objectify women more and portray them as empowered less than in previous decades and that lyrics in country songs sung by male singers seem to be driving the trend toward objectification and less empowerment. Findings provide empirical support for the criticisms leveled at country music lyrics by those in the popular press and in the country music industry. Future research is needed in order to draw conclusions about the influence of exposure to country music on attitudes and behaviors related to female gender roles and objectification of women.

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