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## From "courtesy of the red, white, and blue" to "if you're reading this": patriotic themes in country music between 2000-2010

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**FROM “COURTESY OF THE RED, WHITE, AND BLUE” TO “IF YOU’RE READING  
THIS”: PATRIOTIC THEMES IN COUNTRY MUSIC BETWEEN 2000-2010**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by  
Claire Carville  
B.A., The University of Alabama, 2009  
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## ABSTRACT

Music plays an important role in the lives of individuals and often reflects important societal values. Music can also serve as an important reflection of the public's current opinion at a given point in time. Patriotism is a feeling of love for one's homeland and has often been the subject matter of music lyrics throughout history.

In particular, country music has been perceived as being an especially patriotic genre of music. This thesis utilized quantitative and qualitative content analyses as the methods to examine the patriotic content of country music lyrics over the past decade. The sample was adapted from *Billboard's* year-end "Hot Country Songs" chart.

Nearly 40% of the sample conveyed patriotic themes. The majority of these songs expressed blind patriotism, or unquestioning support of America. The songs that exuded patriotism were categorized into one of four themes: songs about terrorist attacks, wartime and the armed forces; songs about the American dream; songs about current events in America; and songs celebrating American life.

Additionally, the songs about terrorism, wartime, and the armed forces experienced a shift in tone throughout the decade. The beginning of the time period contained songs that were overtly pro-America and pro-war, the middle of the decade included songs that were much softer and focused on the soldiers' lives rather than the actual war, and lastly, the end of the decade contained songs that told stories of wartime casualties that many families were experiencing first handedly.

This study illustrates that country music's narrative and story-like lyrics have captured the patriotic feelings experienced by many people throughout the past decade. These songs



collectively provided a snapshot of the opinions and values of society throughout the past decade.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Popular music plays an important role in the lives of individuals and in society. Giles, Hajda, and Hamilton (2009) observed, “Music is a social phenomenon, human product, and a form of communication between composer, performer, and audience” (p. 1). The music that an individual listens to and consumes can give a glimpse into his identity (Rodriguez-Bailon, Ruiz & Moya, 2009). Shuker (2002) stated, “Popular music is clearly of enormous importance in people’s daily lives, and for some it is central to their social identities” (p. xii). Furthermore, music is considered to be “amongst the most highly structured cultural expressions reflecting social groups’ essential values” (Giles, Hajda, and Hamilton, 2009, p. 1).

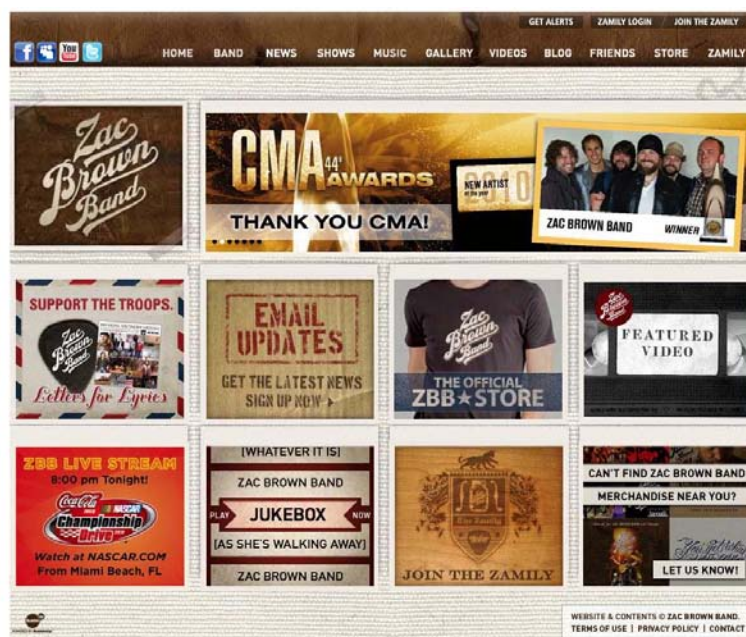
Meizel (2006) explained that music acts as “a social and political indicator that mirrors and influences the society we all live in.” Thereby, music serves as a useful form of media for capturing the history, public opinions, and societal values of a given time period. With the ability to shed insight about the values of a society, music is a significant topic for research. Country music, a genre within popular music, is particularly useful in examining society, because the genre is “constantly changing and growing in complexity, just as the society in which it thrives also matures and evolves” (Malone, 2002, p. 1).

Music is a social relic, with the capacity to narrate public opinion and communicate attitudes and beliefs. One of the most important sentiments of group identity is feeling of love for one’s homeland, known as patriotism. So, it should come as no surprise that music serves as an outlet for expression of patriotism.

Over the years, country music in particular has been a genre in which expressing a love for America has been prevalent. Country musicians have showcased their support of America in

many different ways and on many different platforms, including pro-America lyrics, USO tours to entertain the armed forces, creative social media campaigns, interviews, and awards show performances. Zac Brown Band's performance at the 2010 Grammy awards was a recent example of country music's public expression of patriotism. The band won the Best New Artist award and performed "America the Beautiful" as a prelude to their hit song "Chicken Fried," at the all-genre awards show.

Additionally, country artists have also used platforms, such as their official websites and social media pages, to engage in patriotic activity. Zac Brown Band partnered with Dodge to carry out a letter writing campaign for deployed armed forces. The premise: write a letter to a soldier and drop it off at a local Dodge dealership for an entrance into a contest to meet the band and receive free downloads. The band's homepage prominently features an icon for the campaign with the words "Support the Troops" (see Figure 1) and they promote the campaign through social media.



**Figure 1.** Zac Brown Band's Homepage

Similarly, in November 2010, Brad Paisley took the stage for a performance of a new song, “This is Country Music,” at the Country Music Association Awards show. With an acoustic opening, under a single spotlight followed by a full band and images of country music artists through the ages, the lyrics of the song celebrated the often simple, relatable, and real-life subject matter of country music.



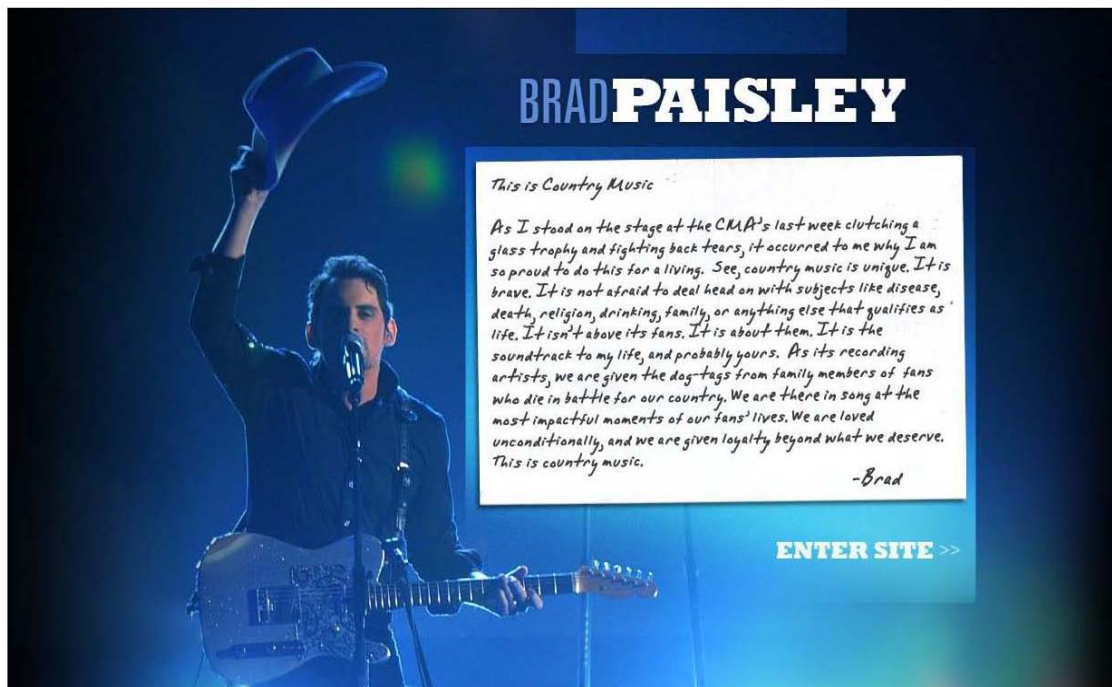
**Figure 2. Brad Paisley’s Performance of “This is Country Music”**

In the middle of the song, the lights were lowered with an American flag in the background (see Figure 2) as Paisley observed country music’s patriotic nature with the following lines:

*Are you haunted by the echo of your Mother  
On the phone  
Crying as she tells you that your brother’s  
Not coming home  
Well, if there’s anyone that still has pride  
In the memory of those that died defending  
The old red, white, and blue  
This is country music*

*And we do*

After debuting the single, Paisley offered a free download of the single on his website (see Figure 3). On the homepage a note from Paisley to his fans read, “As its [country music’s] recording artists, we are given the dog-tags from family members of fans who die in battle for our country. We are there to sing at the most impactful moments of our fans’ lives” (Brad Paisley, 2010).



**Figure 3.** Brad Paisley's Homepage

The purpose of this study is to examine the patriotic content contained in popular country music song lyrics over the past decade. In 2002, Malone, one of the most prolific country music scholars, asserted, “Country music scholars still have far to go in demonstrating the cultural relevance of their subject” (p.xi). This study also attempts to further the goal of country music scholars to make country music accepted as a valuable medium for cultural relevance.

This study significantly contributes to the current field of mass communication, because it examines widely listened to and distributed content: country music. Additionally, the time period in which it investigates, 2001-2010, contained significant events that shaped recent American history, including the terrorist attacks of September 11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and President Barack Obama's historic election.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Patriotism**

Patriotism is an important value that has defined much of history. Shatz, Staub, and Lavine (1999) stated, “Patriotism is arguably one of the most important forms of group attachment in the modern world” (p. 152). Most broadly defined, patriotism is a love of or attachment to one’s homeland (McCleary, Nalls, & Williams, 2009; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) and Merry (2009) further explained that patriotism is not merely an emotion or attitude, but it also inspires action. This action is a sense of duty that derives from patriotic feelings that can manifest into a desire to somehow protect the liberties and honor of one’s country.

Bratta (2009) more specifically defines patriotism, in relation to Americans, by referring to notions of “freedom or liberty, democracy, individualism, equality or egalitarianism, law, and the American dream” (p. 233). Shatz, Staub, and Lavine (1999) recognized and defined two different types of patriotism: blind patriotism and constructive patriotism.

Blind patriotism is most commonly defined as “a rigid and inflexible attachment to country, characterized by unquestioning positive evaluation, staunch allegiance, and intolerance of criticism” (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999, p. 153). Huddy and Khatib (2007) conferred that blind patriotism instills unconditional allegiance to authorities and is closely related to and may lead to feelings of nationalism.

Conversely, Schatz, Staub, & Lavine (1999) explained, “constructive patriotism refers to an attachment to country characterized by ‘critical loyalty’” (p. 153). This form of patriotism enables the patriot to think critically and even disagree with his country or leaders’ actions,

decision-making, and policies. Where a constructive patriot would view questioning his country as an act of wanting to improve his country, a blind patriot would view the act of any deviation, questioning, or opposition as disloyal. In an experiment, Schatz, Staub, and Lavine (1999) found that blind patriotism was significantly linked to self-reported conservatives, while constructive patriotism had no significant relationship to self-reported liberals or conservatives.

### **Pros and Cons of Patriotism**

Scholars have debated the positive and negative outcomes spawning from attachment to one's homeland. Li and Brewer (2004) explained some of the positives by writing, "Group identification at the national level, like other social identities, creates bonds of solidarity among members...and provides the motivation for being a good group member at the individual level – that is, for enacting the voluntary, participatory behaviors that constitute the citizen role" (p. 727). Negative consequences of patriotism include "authoritarianism, intolerance, and warmongering" (Li & Brewer, 2004, p. 728).

### **Patriotism and Times of Crisis or War**

Scholars have reported on periods throughout history, where patriotism was expressed through "extroversion or national self-assertion" (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 258). The "patriotism excess" usually stems from some kind of conflict, namely times of war or outside threat. McCleary, Thalls, & Williams (2009) found that both times of crisis and war heighten feelings of blind and constructive patriotism. After examining a period of intensified patriotism, scholars observed an "ebb," in which people tend to return to normal levels of patriotism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989).



This ebb and flow cycle of patriotism has occurred often throughout history. Bratta (2009) offered a modern example in the period subsequent to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when feelings of patriotism were heightened and the purchasing and displaying of the American flag dramatically increased. Bratta (2009) ascertained that this display itself exemplified an act of patriotism.

Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) illustrated this with a historical example from World War II. During this time in Nazi Germany excessive patriotism turned into nationalism, thereby enabling some of the greatest atrocities in modern history to occur. At this time, the term ‘nationalism’ was used interchangeably with ‘patriotism’ giving a “negative connotation to the concept of patriotism” (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 258).

Though related to patriotism, nationalism is a very different form of national identity. Patriotism and nationalism both concern pride and the positive evaluation of one’s homeland, however patriotism is usually associated with liberalism and tolerance, while nationalism is associated with “authoritarianism, values, and intolerance” (Li & Brewer, 2004, p. 728). Simply defined, nationalism is the “self-perception of superiority and extension of their beliefs to other nations” (Bratta, 2009, p. 236). De Figueiredo and Elkins (2003) identified nationalism as a “corrupt form of patriotism” that often carries a negative connotation. This study focuses on patriotism, as opposed to nationalism, though distinguishing between the two sentiments is important.

With the ebb and flow of patriotism, popular culture of the time period mirrors these intensified feelings. This study examines if these cycles of intensified patriotism have been illustrated in the content of popular country music.

## **Popular Music**

As previously stated, music plays a significant role in the lives of people as well as in society, in addition to being a very profitable industry. Shuker (2005) explained the multi-faceted business model by writing, “The products of the music industry outweigh those of any other cultural industry, with income including not just the sales...but also copyright revenue, tour profits, sales of the music press, musical instruments and sound systems” (p. xii).

Popular music may be defined in a variety of ways that includes many different types of music. While some consider popular music as any music with a following, academics have largely “equated ‘popular music’ with the main commercially produced and marketed musical genres, primarily in a Western context” (Shuker, 2005, p. xiii). While this definition has the potential to exclude many types of international music, “Western styles of popular music continue to dominate the international market place” (Shuker, 2005, p. xiii). This thesis specifically examines country music, as a specific genre within popular music.

## **Song Lyrics**

Song lyrics, the actual words sung, are a very important component of popular music. Aday and Austin (2000) described this importance by writing, “Song lyrics provide uniquely potent means of arriving at basic attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. More specifically, music plays an important role in society, and its lyrics often deal with real concerns and problems of America and its people” (p. 136).

Studies analyzing the content of the lyrics of popular music have been around since the 1940s. Most of the early studies of this kind analyzed relationships, courtship, and love (Horton, 1956; Mooney, 1954). But, after the 1960s, “lyrics began to work in different ways and deal with

a far wider range of subject matter” (Astor, 2010, p. 144). It was during this time period that song lyrics were largely revered to have an “element of substance and layers of meaning,” garnering more studies analyzing lyrics (Astor, 2010 p. 144).

Astor (2010), noted that when words “exist within a song, sung, have a provenance and function that needs to be looked at above and beyond their place within the sound palette of a track” (p. 148). Other than romantic relationships, lyrics have also been examined for other things, such as alcohol, drugs, violence, racism, and sexism (Herd, 2005). Examining this content is critical, because it often mirrors or persuades actions in real life. For example “The violent song increases in aggressive thoughts and feelings have implications for real world violence” (“Violent Music Lyrics,” 2003). Cooper (1998) noted that studies of lyrics that dealt with the image of women in popular songs have also been prevalent since the 1970s.

Specifically, many studies utilized country music in analyzing lyrics for a variety of subjects. Aday and Austing (2000) used popular country music songs to analyze the perception of old age and the aging process communicated through lyrics. Another example is Horn’s (2009) study of popular female country artists’ songs and determined Gretchen Wilson’s lyrics to be “hard,” versus other popular female artists whose lyrics were perceived as “soft.” Additionally, in similar fashion to this study, Van Sickle (2005) analyzed the lyrics of popular country songs to find a presence of political themes.

## **Country Music**

According to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), country music was the second most profitable genre of music in 2008. Additionally, country music artists Garth Brooks and Shania Twain boast two of the top ten best-selling records of all time, while Garth

Brooks holds the third place spot for the best-selling artist of all time, after The Beatles and Elvis Presley (Recording Industry Association of America, 2010).

Country musicians also have acquired success beyond record sales with hugely popular and profitable tours. In 2009, Kenny Chesney hosted the most profitable tour in country music and performed for over one million fans, making it his seventh consecutive year to do so (Waddell, 2010). Furthermore, country music is the most listened to music via the radio, with a reported 70 million listeners and 2,318 stations (Kingsbury & Nash, 2006; Hart, 2005).

Recently country musicians have also claimed other prestigious records in the digital market. For example, as of January 2010, Taylor Swift was the all-time top artist for digital download sales as well as the top female artist for one-week digital download sales (Pietroluongo, 2010). Additionally, Nielson recognized Tim McGraw for two major achievements this decade: the most played single of any genre, for “Something Like That,” and the most played artist of any genre over the past decade, with nearly 8 million total radio spins (Skates, 2010). With these widespread accomplishments from country artists, it appears odd that country music took years to gain legitimacy within the larger music industry (Pecknold, 2007). Nonetheless, it is now widely accepted as an important and prolific part of American popular culture, clearly appealing to a mass audience.

Country music’s commercial origins began in the 1920s, but have greatly evolved into the format that it is recognized as today. In its early days, country music was referred to by many different monikers, including “hillbilly” and “folk,” until the industry finally adopted “country” (Pecknold, 2007, p. 54). Pecknold (2007) observed that while country music may have been regionally popular, “It was not until 1944 that *Billboard* added the element that was

really needed for the larger industry to make sense of hillbilly music: popularity charts” (p.59). While the name and sound of country music has evolved over the years, one thing that remains unchanged is that country music is “still music about real people and real lives” and it focuses on “communicating common experiences” (Kingsbury & Nash, 2006, p. 8).

Patriotism is an earnest feeling that is experienced by many different people, which has consequentially made it the theme in much of the music in American society, including country. Since country music’s origins, it has often been regarded as a genre that offers commentary on real issues and feelings, such as patriotism. Hart (2005) echoed this by writing, “In the United States, country music has long served as a conveyer of values that go far beyond mere entertainment” (p.155).

The rights offered by the First Amendment afford musicians in the United States the freedom to write lyrics and music about any subject they please. Historically, country music has often offered commentary on current events in American society. Putnam (2009) observed, “Country music has long shown a penchant for patriotic and even pro-war tunes” (p. 602). For example, subsequent to the attack on Pearl Harbor, many country songs emerged about or with reference to the attacks. Additionally, in response to America’s involvement in the Vietnam War, many songs were recorded as a political reply to America’s involvement, such as “Viet Nam Blues” by Kris Kristofferson.

Country music “articulates the thoughts, feelings, and lifestyles” of Americans (Cusic & Szatmary, 2009, p. 19). This renders it a worthy genre for examination to determine the patriotic and political themes that capture American society’s values during a period of time. The purpose

of this study is to obtain an overview of the patriotic themes in popular music, from the years 2001 to 2010.

### **Country Music on Politics and Patriotism**

Country music, in particular, has been perceived as being a politically conservative and a patriotic genre of music. Pecknold (2007) explained that George Wallace employed many country songs and artists in his gubernatorial and presidential campaigns. Soon after, President Richard Nixon also began to make use of country music to rally a large group of swing voters: many of who were country music fans (Pecknold, 2007). The Nixon campaign strategy was to use country music to reach the American blue-collar workers. Pecknold (2007) further argued, “country music did not so much shift to the right as the right shifted to country, consciously seeking to transform an established marketing demographic into a political one” (p. 219). Cusic (2008) further explained the connection between the Republican party to country music by writing, “Republican candidates have expressed more middle-America values or southern values and that’s translated in country music” (p. 160).

While country music has been featured in many recent political campaigns, President Nixon was one of the first to use it on a national platform. Not only did he employ it in his campaign, but he even dedicated the new Grand Ole Opry House in 1974 as the Watergate scandal was unfolding (Hart, 2005). Other presidential campaigns that utilized country music included President Ronald Reagan’s use of Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the U.S.A.,” President George W. Bush’s use “Only in America” by Brooks and Dunn and “We the People” by Billy Ray Cyrus, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s use of “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton, among others.

President George H. W. Bush was a president who not only endorsed country music in his campaign, but “fully embraced country music and its values” (Hart, 2005, p. 158). President Bush made remarks about country music’s influence at the Country Music Awards in 1991 after the Gulf War stating, “Country music gives us a window on the real world. And when I want to feel a surge of patriotism or turn nostalgic or even when I need a little free advice about Saddam Hussein, I turn to country music” (Bush, 1991). He continued and observed, “It’s easy to see why America loves country music, country music loves America” (Bush, 1991). President Bush later echoed these sentiments in his memoir stating, “I love country music...I love the lyrics of country music, and the patriotism of the people” (Bush, 1999, p. 302).

Like his father, President George W. Bush publically expressed his love for the genre. He prominently integrated country music in his presidential campaigns and employed country artists at campaign rallies (Hart, 2005). President Barack Obama also hosted a country music event at the White House featuring Brad Paisley, Allison Krauss, and Charley Pride. The event was part of a concert series celebrating American music. In the opening remarks of the event President Obama called country music a “uniquely American art form” and continued to state:

Now, I know folks think I’m a “city boy” -- but I do appreciate listening to country music because like all Americans, I appreciate the broad and indelible impact that country has had on our nation. It’s touched countless lives, it’s influenced all genres of music, it’s helped us make the American people more hopeful, it’s captured our restlessness and resilience, and told so much of our story in the process (Obama, 2009).

In addition to country music being perceived as playing a role in campaigns and politics, it is also perceived to be patriotic. Van Sickel (2005) explained that country music is mainly

built on lyrics and storytelling and thus can be studied for social significance. Subsequent to the attacks on September 11, country artists had overwhelmingly engaged in a variety of political and patriotic acts, including statements in interviews, in lyrics, and in performing for US armed forces through the United Services Organization (USO). Boulton (2008) illustrated that patriotic songs, released by Alan Jackson, Toby Keith, and Darryl Worley, had widespread success on country music radio, while the Dixie Chicks' criticism of President Bush led to a widespread rejection of their music by country music fans and censorship by many country radio stations.

Cusic and Szatmary (2009) wrote, "Patriotic songs heard on country radio generally present the conservative view in a variety of ways but usually defend America against questions, criticisms or challenges and support whatever actions or policies our country is engaged in" (p. 19). Since the authors inferred that country music portrays blind patriotism, this study attempts to determine the truth in this assertion. Cusic and Szatmary (2009) further point out an overarching theme of an "unyielding belief: 'we live in the greatest country on earth'" (p. 22).

Van Sickle (2005) conducted a study that found a lack of political content and other concepts, including patriotism, in the top country music songs from 1960-2000. Wolfe and Akenson (2005) suggested their belief that the quantity of country music lyrics with this content has increased, claiming, "events of the last few years have brought to the nation a new sense of patriotism and renewed interest in songs that reflect on these difficult times" (p. vii). This thesis applies Van Sickle's (2005) research as a preliminary foundation in attempting to measure political content and other concepts, especially patriotism, in country music, from 2001-2010, in an attempt to confirm Wolfe and Akenson's belief that country music has become more patriotic.



## **Social Identity Theory**

This thesis is based on the theory of social identity – including both people’s music preferences and feelings of patriotism towards the United States. Social psychologists, Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, developed social identity theory in the late 1970s, to explain the importance of membership to social groups to one’s identity. The theory was developed with the goal of understanding “social categorization, ethnocentrism, and intergroup relations” (Hogg and Cooper, 2003, p. 15).

In order to understand social identity theory, one must first have an understanding of the definition of a group. Hogg and Abrams (2003) stated, “A group exists when two or more people define themselves as members of it and when its existence is recognized by at least one other” (p. 407). After defining a group in the theoretical context, Tajfel (1981) simply defined social identity as “an awareness of one’s objective membership in the group and a psychological sense of group attachment” (p. 254).

Social identity theory posits, “People automatically categorize others into groups, and that on the basis of categorization the social world is divided into in-groups and out-groups” (Hogg and Cooper, 2003). Ashforth and Mael (1989) offered two reasons for the natural tendency to categorize people into groups: it “cognitively segments and orders the social environment, providing the individual with a systematic means of defining others” and it “enables the individual to locate and define him- or herself in the social environment” (p. 21). Tajfel (1978) called this process of viewing groups in order to simplify an individual’s environment ‘social categorization’ (p. 61).

These groups can be categorized in a variety of ways (e.g. religion, gender, age, education, music preferences, etc.) and there are varying degrees of attachment to a group. An individual can consider himself a member of a group by simply perceiving his membership without having to be an active member of the group, or an individual can be an active member working toward the group's goals (Ashworth & Mael, 1989, p. 21).

### **In-group Bias and Stereotypes**

Social identity theorists have revealed that an individual perceives the group to which he or she belongs in a more positive and favorable manner than the groups in which he or she does not belong. The mere act of belonging to a group produced a sense of loyalty and in-group favoritism (or in-group bias) to the group, thus they called this phenomenon the “minimal social situation” or “minimal group”(Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 24). These minimal conditions that result in in-group favoritism have been replicated and proven in several different studies (Huddy, 2001).

Hogg and Abrams (2003) defined intergroup behavior as “how people in groups perceive, think about, act towards, and relate to people in other groups” (p. 407). Brown (2000) noted that, “people show intergroup differentiation [through intergroup behavior] partly to feel good about their group (and themselves)” (p. 747). Intergroup behavior and in-group bias can lead to feelings of ethnocentrism or “a view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it . . . each group boasts itself superior . . . and looks with contempt on others” (Sumner, 1906, p. 13).

Ashworth and Mael (1989) observed, “much intergroup conflict stems from the very fact that groups exist” (p.31). They continued to argue that group members tend to recall “intergroup

differences rather than similarities,” thus, making the perception of the out-group more differentiated than it is in reality (Ashworth & Mael, 1989, p. 71).

The existence of in-group bias tends to lead to stereotyping of the out-group (Brown, 2000; Ashworth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1978; Hogg & Cooper, 2003). Hogg and Cooper (2003) noted, “people tend to minimize the differences between people within groups, and accentuate or maximize the differences between individuals in different groups” (p. 16). By characterizing all members of a group as a whole, rather than individuals, stereotypes are formed (Hogg & Cooper, 2003, p. 16). Many scholars have found that the intrinsic action of applying stereotypes to other groups, enables the in-group to justify its’ act of distancing itself from other groups (Hogg & Abrams, 2003; Ashworth & Mael, 1989).

### **Social Identity Theory and Patriotism**

Social identity theory can be applied to patriotism in that individuals who feel love and attachment to the same country or homeland feel a sense of group unity. With patriotism, this is formed by feeling a sense of group identity with the country in which there is a feeling of attachment. The out-group members become those who have negative feelings toward that country. Huddy and Khatib (2007) define “national identity as a subjective or internalized sense of belonging to the nation and measure it with questions that typically assess social identities” (p. 65).

Scholars engage in debate of whether patriotism and social identity can raise prejudices. Some scholars argue, “strong group identity can be an empowering, affirming mechanism in the face of discrimination” while others argue, “group pride – whether it be ethnic, national, or gender based – is a positive half of prejudice” (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003, p. 171). De

Figueiredo & Elkins' (2003) research found that two different relationships existed between nationalism and patriotism. The nationalists were "hostile toward immigrants" while patriots were no more hostile than "the average citizen" (de Figueiredo & Elkins, 2003, p. 173). This finding rejected much of what scholars previously thought.

### **Social Identity Theory and Music**

Music has long been a strong form of self-expression, particularly for the youth (Rentfrow, McDonald, & Oldmeadow, 2009). With advancements in technology, such as social networking websites like Facebook, "People can share whatever information about themselves they choose," and "music preferences are among the most common" (Rentfrow, McDonald, & Oldmeadow, 2009, p. 329). By sharing these preferences, individuals "are using music to make identity claims ... about who they are, who they want to be, and how they want others to perceive them" (Rentfrow, McDonald, & Oldmeadow, 2009, p. 329).

By expressing music preferences, Rentfrow, McDonald, and Oldmeadow (2009) conceived that individuals are essentially placing themselves in a group. This categorization can influence how others will perceive them. In an experiment, Rentfrow and Gosling (2007) found that respondents largely agree about stereotypes of fans of certain genres of music. Rentfrow, McDonald, & Oldmeadow (2009) claimed, "Sharing information about one's music preferences effectively sends a message to others that the person possesses attitudes, values, and beliefs that are in line with those of the members of that social group" (p. 330).

Furthermore, Giles, Hajda, and Hamilton (2009) stated, "Music...is a significant dimension of personal and particularly social identity, relating as it does to nationalities,

ethnicities, religions, politics, age groups, and generations, genders, and sexual orientations”  
(p.1).

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND EXPECTED FINDINGS**

Country music, perhaps more than any other musical genre, has aligned itself as pro-America and patriotic. This study attempted to uncover the types of patriotic messages contained in the lyrics of popular country songs. In doing so, the following research questions were examined.

**RQ1:** How prevalent are patriotic themes in country music?

**RQ2:** What types of patriotic messages are conveyed by popular country music song lyrics?

Additionally, this study attempted to discover if the types of patriotic messages found in the lyrics of popular country songs changed over the past decade.

**RQ3:** Did the type, tone, or nature of the patriotic message shift from soon after the attacks of 9/11 to present?

Based on the review of existing literature on popular music and patriotism, I formed several expectations for the research questions. As established in the existing research on the relationship of country music and patriotism, research question one and two would assume country music will contain themes of patriotism – specifically blind patriotism. Based on country music content of the past decade, Wolfe and Akenson (2005) poignantly wrote, “Events of the last ten years have brought to the nation a new sense of patriotism and a renewed interest in songs that reflect on these difficult times” (p.vii).

Furthermore, based on Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) assertion of heightened feelings of patriotism subsequent national crises, I believed I would find 2002 and 2003 to be the years

with the highest percentage, due to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the beginning of the Iraq War.

**H1:** Male artists' songs are more patriotic than women's songs.

Hypothesis one is based on a 2010 Gallup poll data that shows that only 28% of women consider themselves as extremely patriotic, whereas 37% of men feel that they are extremely patriotic (see appendix C).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHOD**

This study employed a quantitative and qualitative content analysis as the primary methods for examining the content of the music lyrics, in order to answer the proposed research questions. Kerlinger (2000) defined content analysis as “a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables” (p. 607). The goal is to identify the content of the communication, in this case song lyrics, and to examine the changes over time.

This content analysis was a lyrical analysis of the songs in the sample. Brackett (2000) stated, “to analyze lyrics means not to abstract them from their context in a recorded performance,” rather, “it means to try to understand how lyrics and performances work to create a sense of a particular genre, a particular audience, and a particular relationship between performer and audience” (p. 78). He continued, “lyrics in country music provide a particularly graphic connection between the song as a commodity, the production and interpretation of ‘authenticity’ and the commoditization of the very idea of ‘authenticity’” (Brackett, 2000, p.78).

Content analyses enable researchers to “describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context both of production and consumption” (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005, p. 25). For the purpose of this study, implementing a content analysis enabled an all-encompassing look at the patriotic subject matter of the sample.

### **Sample**

This study implemented a purposive, nonprobability sampling technique in order to generate the songs that made up the sample. The songs in the sample were adapted from



*Billboard* magazine's year-end "Hot Country Songs" rankings for 2001-2010.

I chose *Billboard* magazine's rankings to make up the sample because it is considered the most credible source of ranking songs based on the frequency of radio play and it is "the leading publication of the United States entertainment industry" (Brackett, 2000, p. 1). Additionally, *Billboard* is "the primary source of information on trends and innovation in music, serving music fans, artists, top executives, tour promoters, publishers, radio programmers, lawyers, retailers, digital entrepreneurs and many others" (Billboard, 2010).

*Billboard* began using Nielsen SoundScan, the most state-of-the-art technology, to "report sales data via bar-code scans" (Kingsbury & Nash, 2006, p. 329). According to *Billboard's* official website (2010), rankings are based on "radio airplay...sales data...and streaming activity data provided by online music sources." Thus, *Billboard* contains the most accurate and widely accepted rankings of music within the industry, which is why it is an appropriate source to make up the sample.

### **Selection of Genre**

The songs in the sample were made up from songs on the year-end "Hot Country Songs" chart rankings between 2001 and 2010. Country was the musical genre used as the level of analysis in this study. Previous research has indicated that genres, rather than sub-genres, are the optimal level at which to study music (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003; Rentfrow, McDonald, & Oldmeadow, 2009). Rentfrow and Gosling's (2003) study found that 97% of participants were familiar with broad music genres but only a small number were able to identify specific sub-genres. Thus, the broad genre of country was used versus the sub-genres of country, such as bluegrass or folk, in order to yield the best analysis of this specific genre.

## Selection of Songs

The 60 songs of each year-end chart were considered for the sample. Out of these songs, 90 songs were selected to be in the sample, based on 16 “filter words.” If the words ‘America,’ ‘U.S.A.,’ ‘United States,’ ‘American,’ ‘country,’ ‘nation,’ ‘war,’ ‘hero,’ ‘soldier,’ ‘troops,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘free,’ ‘equality,’ ‘liberty,’ ‘military,’ or ‘veteran’ were present in the lyrics, then the song was selected into the sample (see Table 1).

These words were used in the selection process in order to eliminate completely irrelevant songs that may have been included in the chart. This filtering selection process also ensured that the songs analyzed were widely heard and consumed songs via radio and sales versus using obscure, little known songs.

**Table 1.**

### **Sample**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Position</b>
2010	Rain is a Good Thing	Luke Bryan	2
2010	American Honey	Lady Antebellum	12
2010	Crazy Town	Jason Aldean	16
2010	Our Kind of Love	Lady Antebellum	17
2010	A Little More Country Than That	Easton Corbin	19
2010	Little White Church	Little Big Town	23
2010	That's How Country Boys Roll	Billy Currington	26
2010	Hillbilly Bone	Blake Shelton & Trace Adkins	31
2010	Ain't Back Yet	Kenny Chesney	33
2010	American Saturday Night	Brad Paisley	34
2010	Free	Zac Brown Band	36
2010	Backwoods	Justin Moore	41
2010	Southern Voice	Tim McGraw	43
2010	This Ain't Nothing	Craig Morgan	49
2010	Way Out Here	Josh Thompson	58
2010	Do I	Luke Bryan	59
2009	People are Crazy	Billy Currington	7
2009	Small Town USA	Justin Moore	11

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2009	It's America	Rodney Atkins	17
2009	American Ride	Toby Keith	22
2009	Welcome to the Future	Brad Paisley	24
2009	Love Your Love the Most	Eric Church	39
2009	Nothin' to Die For	Tim McGraw	42
2009	Always the Love Songs	Eli Young Band	52
2008	Just a Dream	Carrie Underwood	16
2008	All American Girl	Carrie Underwood	24
2008	Put a Girl in It	Brooks & Dunn	30
2008	Holler Back	The Lost Trailers	33
2008	Country Man	Luke Bryan	40
2008	Chicken Fried	Zac Brown Band	49
2007	Good Directions	Billy Currington	2
2007	If You're Reading This	Tim McGraw	8
2007	Free and Easy Down the Road I Go	Dierks Bentley	9
2007	Moments	Emerson Drive	13
2007	Last Dollar	Tim McGraw	17
2007	Love Me If You Can	Toby Keith	18
2007	Ticks	Brad Paisley	20
2007	Beer In Mexico	Kenny Chesney	24
2007	Ladies Love Country Boys	Trace Adkins	25
2007	Everyday America	Sugarland	49
2007	Don't Make Me	Blake Shelton	58
2006	Would You Go With Me	Josh Turner	6
2006	Every Mile a Memory	Dierks Bentley	32
2006	The Seashores of Old Mexico	George Strait	53
2006	Mountains	Lonestar	59
2005	Fast Cars and Freedom	Rascal Flatts	5
2005	Gone	Montgomery Gentry	10
2005	Something To Be Proud Of	Montgomery Gentry	17
2005	Play Something Country	Brooks & Dunn	22
2005	Somebody's Hero	Jamie O'Neal	23
2005	Songs About Me	Trace Adkins	27
2005	Better Life	Keith Urban	29
2005	Awful Beautiful Life	Darryl Worley	36
2005	Help Somebody	Van Zant	42
2005	Goodbye Time	Blake Shelton	47
2005	Hicktown	Jason Aldean	48
2004	You'll Think of Me	Keith Urban	3
2004	Letters From Home	John Michael Montgomery	5
2004	American Soldier	Toby Keith	6
2004	Redneck Woman	Gretchen Wilson	11
2004	There Goes My Life	Kenny Chesney	22

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2004	In My Daughter's Eyes	Martina McBride	35
2004	I Love This Bar	Toby Keith	52
2004	Hey Good Lookin'	Jimmy Buffet	53
2004	Save A Horse (Ride a Cowboy)	Big & Rich	54
2004	Spend My Time	Clint Black	60
2003	19 Somethin'	Mark Wills	3
2003	Have You Forgotten	Darryl Worley	12
2003	Who Wouldn't Want to be Me	Keith Urban	20
2003	I Love to Love You Out Loud	Rascal Flatts	27
2003	A Few Questions	Clay Walker	35
2003	Travelin Soldier	Dixie Chicks	48
2003	Red Rag Top	Tim McGraw	60
2002	Drive	Alan Jackson	2
2002	Living and Living Well	George Strait	3
2002	Bring on the Rain	Jo Dee Messina	16
2002	The Long Goodbye	Brooks & Dunn	17
2002	Where Were You	Alan Jackson	24
2002	Where Would You Be	Martina McBride	27
2002	Courtesy of the Red, White, & Blue	Toby Keith	28
2002	American Child	Phil Vassar	32
2002	Riding with Private Malone	David Ball	57
2002	I Cry	Tammy Cochran	59
2001	She Couldn't Change Me	Montgomery Gentry	7
2001	Only in America	Brooks & Dunn	14
2001	Where the Blacktop Ends	Keith Urban	15
2001	Burn	Jo Dee Messina	21
2001	Where I Come From	Alan Jackson	24
2001	Love of a Woman	Travis Tritt	37
2001	Born to Fly	Sara Evans	39

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## Procedure

In order to examine the research questions, I composed a code sheet and code book that examine patriotic lyrics in country music (see Appendices A and B). The instrument clearly defines explicit terms as well as coding for more implicit concepts, not directly stated, of patriotism.

It was important to actually listen to the song during the coding process, versus analyzing the lyrics alone, because the tone of the music and artists' voices can communicate possible negative connotation and sarcasm that would not be attained merely reading the lyrics. For this reason, I used websites such as YouTube, CMT, Pandora and artists' official websites, in order to listen to the songs during the coding process. I looked up the official lyrics on CMT's lyric database as well as the artists' websites. If the lyrics could not be found on either of these sources, I conducted an Internet search in order to find them.

I trained a second coder who coded a reliability sample of 15 songs using the same code sheet. Then, tests of intercoder reliability were conducted using Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) to ensure reliable data. For the data collected, Krippendorff's alpha ranged from 1 to 0.74 (see Table 2).

**Table 2.**

**Krippendorff's Alpha Results**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Percent Agreement</b>	<b>Krippendorff's Alpha</b>
<b>Gender</b>	100	1
<b>America</b>	100	1
<b>United States</b>	100	1
<b>USA</b>	100	1
<b>American</b>	100	1
<b>Nation</b>	100	1
<b>Country</b>	100	1
<b>Freedom</b>	100	1
<b>Free</b>	100	1
<b>Equality</b>	100	1
<b>Liberty</b>	100	1
<b>War</b>	100	1
<b>Hero</b>	100	1
<b>Soldier</b>	100	1
<b>Troops</b>	100	1
<b>Military</b>	100	1

<b>Veteran</b>	100	1
<b>Reference without Words</b>	100	1
<b>American War</b>	100	1
<b>Government/Elected Official</b>	100	1
<b>Government Position</b>	100	1
<b>Patriotic</b>	93.33333333	0.902
<b>Type of Patriotism</b>	86.66666667	0.741
<b>Attitudes</b>	93.33333333	0.902
<b>Political Ideology</b>	93.33333333	0.902
<b>Faith/Religion</b>	100	1
<b>Values</b>	100	1

Upon completion of coding, statistical analysis of the data was conducted through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Additionally, following the coding, I analyzed the historical context in order to examine the cultural and societal events surrounding the lyrics that contain a high proportion of the coded data. I looked at the songs containing patriotic themes and examined what was happening in the news media and within the country music industry at the same time.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

This study examined 90 songs ( $N=90$ ). The songs were analyzed for frequencies of words and types of patriotic usage. Afterward, I conducted appropriate statistical tests to determine any significant relationships.

#### Analyzing Frequencies of the Data

All of the filter words were present in at least one song, except “United States” and “troops” (see Table 3). “Country” and “free” were the most commonly used showing up 28 and 26 times respectively. The least frequent words included “military,” “equality,” and “veteran.” An additional 18 songs made reference to one of the keywords, without specifically mentioning it.

**Table 3.**  
**Frequency of Filter Words**

<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
America	5
American	10
U.S.A.	2
United States	0
Country	28
Nation	2
Liberty	2
Freedom	7
Free	26
Military	1
Troops	0
Soldier	8
Veteran	1
Hero	7
Equality	1
War	11

Out of the sample of 90 songs, 33 ( $n=33$ ) of them were patriotic in nature, of which 25 employed notions of blind patriotism, four employed notions of constructive patriotism, and the remainder was unclear. After analyzing the patriotic songs, I created a new variable through which I further categorized the patriotic songs. The variable further defined the themes of the patriotic songs as one of the following:

1. Songs about terrorist attacks, wartime, and armed forces
2. Songs about the American dream
3. Songs about current events in America
4. Songs celebrating America

The frequencies for the new patriotic category showed that the majority were songs about wartime and the next most prevalent were songs celebrating America and the American dream. Songs discussing current events were the least prevalent (see Table 4).

**Table 4.**  
**Frequencies of Patriotism Category**

<b>Patriotism Category</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>
Songs about terrorist attacks, wartime, and armed forces	15 (45.5)
Songs about the American dream	6 (18.2)
Songs about current events in America	4 (12.1)
Songs celebrating America	8 (24.2)

Additionally, there was only one song that was seemingly negative in tone toward America, 27 were positive, and 62 were neutral. Regarding political ideology, 12 were seemingly conservative, two liberal, and the remainder either neutral or political undertones were absent.



A large portion of the sample contained lyrics about religion or faith and societal and cultural values. Thirty-five songs had lyrics referring to religion and faith and 63 contained lyrics about cultural and societal values.

### Analyzing Categorical Data

Because the data was categorical, I ran one-tailed chi-square tests to determine the relationship between variables. First, I calculated the chi-squares for gender and all of the other variables. Three of the relationships were considered significant: ‘equality’ ( $p = 0.013$ ), ‘military’ ( $p = 0.013$ ), and ‘country’ ( $p = 0.038$ ).

**Table 5.**

**Chi-Square Results for Gender and Other Variables**

Variable	$\chi^2$	df	$p$
America	3.536	2	0.085
U.S.A.	0.409	2	0.405
American	0.842	2	0.328
Nation	0.409	2	0.407
Country	5.132	2	0.038*
Freedom	1.518	2	0.234
Free	4.334	2	0.057
Equality	7.263	2	0.013*
Liberty	0.409	2	0.407
War	0.744	2	0.344
Hero	2.126	2	0.172
Soldier	1.636	2	0.220
Military	7.263	2	0.013*
Veteran	0.202	2	0.452
Patriotic	0.739	2	0.345
Positive or Negative Attitudes	3.472	4	0.241
Political Ideology	2.761	4	0.299
Religion or Faith	0.484	3	0.392
Societal and Cultural Values	0.102	2	0.472

\*Significant  $p < .05$

I then ran one-tailed chi-square tests for the new patriotism category variable and the other variables, which resulted in findings similar to gender (See Table 6). The variables that had a significant relationship with the patriotism category were ‘America’ ( $p = 0.035$ ), ‘soldier’ ( $p = 0.016$ ), and positive or negative attitudes ( $p = 0.046$ ).

**Table 6.**

**Chi-Square Results for Patriotism Category and Other Variables**

Variable	$\chi^2$	df	$p$
America	7.071	3	0.035*
U.S.A.	1.238	3	0.372
American	2.916	3	0.202
Nation	1.238	3	0.372
Country	1.742	3	0.314
Freedom	2.255	3	0.260
Free	3.312	3	0.173
Liberty	2.555	3	0.232
War	1.798	3	0.307
Hero	1.439	3	0.348
Soldier	8.8	3	0.016*
Military	1.237	3	0.372
Type of Patriotism	7.609	6	0.134
Positive or Negative Attitudes	10.87	6	0.046*
Political Ideology	3.084	6	0.399
Religion or Faith	2.913	3	0.202

\*Significant  $p < .05$

I also examined the time period in which the song was released and charted. I separated the decade into three periods. The first included the years 2001 – 2003, the second included 2004 – 2006, and the end of the decade was considered 2007 – 2010. The first period included 40% of the patriotic songs, the middle contained 18%, and the last part of the decade comprised 42%.

Additionally, I ran one-tailed chi-square tests to observe the relationship between time period and all of the other variables (see Table 7). The results of this test showed that time period

and patriotism category ( $p = 0.012$ ) and soldier ( $p = 0.035$ ) were the only two variables that were significantly related to the time period.

**Table 7.**

**Chi-Square Results for Time Period and Other Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>df</b>	<b><math>p</math></b>
Patriotism Category	14.494	6	0.012*
America	3.595	2	0.083
U.S.A.	0.477	2	0.394
American	1.327	2	0.257
Nation	0.477	2	0.394
Country	0.362	2	0.417
Freedom	0.572	2	0.375
Free	1.344	2	0.255
Liberty	2.150	2	0.170
War	0.362	2	0.417
Hero	1.287	2	0.262
Soldier	5.299	2	0.035*
Military	1.400	2	0.248
Type of Patriotism	2.523	4	0.320
Positive or Negative Attitudes	3.111	4	0.269
Political Ideology	4.155	4	0.192
Religion or Faith	4.011	2	0.067

\*Significant  $p < .05$

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study yielded information to answer and explore each of the research questions.

**RQ1:** How prevalent are patriotic themes in country music?

The results revealed that patriotism is a fairly common theme of popular country music lyrics. Songs considered patriotic made up nearly 40% of the sample. Considering the countless topics that music lyrics could be written about, this percentage demonstrates that patriotism is a topic of importance in country music.

**RQ2:** What types of patriotic messages are conveyed by popular country music song lyrics?

The patriotic themes found in the songs in the sample ranged from pro-war lyrics to sentimental songs about American childhood to hopeful songs about the American dream and many other themes. As previously stated, the songs containing patriotic notions were divided into four different categories:

1. Songs about terrorist attacks, wartime, and armed forces
2. Songs about the American dream
3. Songs about current events in America
4. Songs celebrating America

After the songs were categorized, examining the patriotic songs within the context of what was happening in the news media, when they were released, provided insight on American life and public opinion.

## **Terrorism, Wartime, and the Armed Forces**

### **“Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)”**

Alan Jackson’s reflective ballad “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)” debuted on November 7, 2001, on the live broadcast of the Country Music Association’s annual awards show. The song poignantly asks listeners, “Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day?” Nearly a month after the terrorist attacks, the song lyrics contained references to God, Bible scriptures, American pride, and iconic pop culture, while playing on the broad range of emotions that Americans experienced following the attacks, such as fear, anger, and self-reflection.

*Did you burst out in pride  
For the red, white, and blue  
And the heroes who died just doing what they do  
Did you look up to heaven for some kind of answer  
And look at yourself and what really matters*

### **“Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)”**

In 2002, Toby Keith released his pro-war, pro-armed forces anthem “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American).” The song is a defiantly patriotic song about defending America at any costs. While the song received widespread success within most of the country community, it did receive some criticism for extreme lyrics, like the following:

*Justice will be served  
And the battle will rage*

*This big dog will fight  
When you rattle his cage  
You'll be sorry that you messed with the U.S. of A  
'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass  
It's the American way*

The song and Keith not only received criticism from displeased listeners, but also received criticism from Natalie Maines, the lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, who called the song “ignorant.”

### **“Travelin’ Soldier”**

The Dixie Chicks’ song, “Travelin’ Soldier” is a coming-of-age narrative that tells a story of a young girl falling in love with a soldier before his deployment to Vietnam. As the heroine of the song waits, the soldier is ultimately a casualty of the war:

*One Friday night at a football game  
The Lord’s Prayer said and the anthem sang  
The man said folks bow your heads  
For a list of local Vietnam dead...  
And one name read and no one really cared  
But a pretty little girl with a bow in her hair*

On the brink of war and undeniable deployment for many military servicemen and women, the lyrics of this song, though set in the past, brought to life the harsh realities of war which regardless of time remain the same.

Beyond the lyrics, the mere release, charting, and descent of this song on *Billboard’s* charts also depicts the blindly patriotic nature of country music radio and the country music

industry. The song reached the number one spot on the weekly country chart the same week Maines made her, now infamous, comments about President Bush during a live show in London, England. During the concert, Maines proclaimed that she was “ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas.” Once the comments made headlines in American media, the Dixie Chicks music was immediately pulled from many radio stations across the country.

After reaching the peak spot the week of the London concert, it only took the song two weeks before it dropped entirely off of the charts. This swift descent on the charts was due to the refusal of country radio stations and programmers to play the single after the comments. This songs’ success and the immediate drop are an illustration of the country music community’s blind patriotism as they shunned one of the genre’s most successful groups for making disparaging remarks about the president.

The short life of this song on the *Billboard* charts and the Dixie Chicks lack of success on the country charts since Maines’ comments further illustrate country music’s narrow definition of patriotism. That is, if an artist or group is willing to express patriotism in any other way than steadfast, uncritical support for the government and the military, the industry, in essence, will reject that artist.

### **“Have You Forgotten?”**

Released almost two years after the attacks of September 11, Darryl Worley’s “Have You Forgotten,” served as an angry reminder of that day. After the fanfare and panic of the attacks had died down and was no longer on the news media, Worley asked “Have you forgotten?” to remind Americans of the attack and justify and garner support for entering war.

*Have you forgotten how it felt that day?*

*To see your homeland under fire  
They took all the footage off my TV  
They said it's too disturbing for you and me  
It'll just breed anger that's what the experts say  
If it was up to me I'd show it every day  
Some say this country's just out looking for a fight  
After 9/11 man I'd have to say that's right*

### **“American Soldier”**

Two years after the release of “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue,” Toby Keith released the much softer “American Soldier.” The song is written through the perspective of a soldier and portrays soldiers as “real” people who also share many of the same responsibilities of other Americans such as parenting, marriage, and providing for a family. This song presents military servicemen and women as relatable people with an extraordinarily stressful job responsibility and duty of protecting their country.

*I will always do my duty  
No matter what the price  
I've counted up the cost  
I know the sacrifice  
Oh, I don't want to die for you  
But if dying's asking me  
I'll bare that cross with honor  
Because freedom don't come free*

The song also describes the American soldier as a proud and hard working individual who values his job, even if it presents risk. In the depiction of the lyrics, the American soldier is



portrayed as a blind patriot who does not question the reasons he is fighting and wants to protect his country above all else.

### **“Letters from Home”**

Similar in theme to “American Soldier,” John Michael Montgomery’s “Letters from Home” gives another realistic portrait of the life of an active duty soldier. The song portrays a homesick soldier who waits for letters from his loved ones at home:

*I hold it up and show my buddies  
Like we ain’t scared and our boots ain’t muddy  
But no one laughs,  
‘Cause there ain’t nothing funny when a soldier cries  
And I just wipe my eyes  
I fold it up and put it in my shirt  
Pick up my gun and get back to work  
And it keeps me driving on  
Waiting on letters from home*

The song lyrics also depicts the camaraderie between soldiers. While the soldier in the song may be homesick, letters from home motivate him to fulfill his duties so he can get back home.

### **“If You’re Reading This”**

“If You’re Reading This” is a somber ballad with lyrics written in the form of a letter from a fallen soldier who never makes it home to his wife and family. It was released in 2007 when the number of casualties of the war in Iraq was increasing.

*I'm laying down my gun  
I'm hanging up my boots  
Tell dad I don't regret following in his shoes  
So lay me down  
In that open field out on the edge of town  
And know my soul  
Is where my Momma always prayed that it would go  
If you're reading this  
I'm already home*

Unfortunately, this song was relatable to many military families. The song debuted at the 2007 Academy of Country Music awards show, where families of fallen soldiers joined McGraw on stage for the performance.

### **Timeline of Songs about Terrorism, Wartime, and the Armed Forces**

Examining the time period in which these songs were released and charted provided a glimpse of insight on the emotions and opinions of the country. As the literature on popular music suggests, music can serve as a fairly accurate indicator of public opinion of society (Meizel, 2006). Looking at a timeline (see Table 8) of the songs concerning terrorism, wartime, and the armed forces gives insight to the third research question:

**RQ3:** Did the type, tone, or nature of the patriotic message shift from soon after the attacks of 9/11 to present?

**Table 8.**

**Timeline of Songs about Terrorism, Wartime, and the Armed Forces**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Song</b>
2002	Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)
2002	Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)
2003	Have You Forgotten?
2003	Travelin' Soldier
2004	American Soldier
2004	Letters from Home
2007	If You're Reading This
2008	Just a Dream

Upon examining the timeline (Table 7), it is evident that during the early part of the decade (2002-2003) key songs exuded unwavering support of America and entering into war. These songs exuded blind patriotism with the steadfast allegiance to America and the leaders' choices. These sentiments mirror the public's favorable opinions and support of entering the war at the time.

After the beginning of the wars, in the middle and late part of the decade (2004-2006) country music shifted to a softer view of war, focusing more on the soldier and less on the war. The release of songs like "American Soldier" and "Letters from Home" illustrated soldiers as real people, not just stoic warriors. And later in the decade, the release of "If You're Reading This" and "Just a Dream" painted pictures of fallen soldiers – a reality that after years of being at war, many Americans were experiencing first handedly.

### **The American Dream**

#### **"Only in America"**

Prior to the attacks of September 11, Brooks and Dunn released their *Steers and Stripes*

album, which included the patriotic song “Only in America.” This song refers to America as the “promised land” and tells the story of children’s dreams being able to come true in America regardless of their background. The chorus, seemingly nationalistic and blindly patriotic, suggests that only in America could an individual dream and find success:

*Only in America*

*Dreaming in red, white, and blue*

*Only in America*

*Where we dream as big as we want to...*

“Only in America” was not only a hit on country radio the year it was released, but has since been used in multiple national political campaigns. For example, President George W. Bush employed the song throughout his 2004 reelection campaign and interestingly, the song was used during the 2008 Democratic National Convention at the conclusion of the President Barack Obama’s acceptance speech for the nomination for president. Kix Brooks, a member of the duo, later released a statement to *Rolling Stone* regarding the song’s ability to cross party lines stating, “[It’s] very flattering to know our song crossed parties and potentially inspires all Americans” (Brooks and Dunn Comment on Obama’s Use of “Only in America,” 2008).

### **“American Child”**

In 2002, Phil Vassar released “American Child,” an autobiographical song about his childhood. It is a rags-to-riches story where he was able to obtain his dreams despite his modest background.

*Who’d ever figure that kid in the yard would go very far?*

*Because 419 Lakewood had no silver spoons*

*Just an old beat up upright that played out of tune  
And now when I count my blessings, I thank God I was an American Child...  
Because dreams can grow wild when born inside an American child*

In addition to describing his childhood, Vassar references his grandfather who fought in World War II so that he could have the freedom to dream in America. This song displays blind patriotism in that it expresses that these opportunities were given to him because he lived in America.

## **Current Events**

### **“Everyday America”**

At the beginning of the economic recession, Sugarland released a new single, “Everyday America,” which provided a snapshot of the struggles that were felt by Americans throughout the country during that period.

*Everybody’s dreaming big  
But everybody’s just getting by  
That’s how it goes in everyday America*

While the song depicts and sympathizes with the hardships that many Americans were experiencing, the lyrics remained positive and optimistic:

*We can laugh, we can cry  
We’re all just looking for the reasons why  
We face the dark ‘til we see the light  
Either way it’ll be alright*

## **“Welcome to the Future”**

Brad Paisley’s “Welcome to the Future” was released subsequent to President Barack Obama’s election in 2008, and is a celebration of American progress. The first verse highlights the advancements in technology from video games to modes of communication:

*Hey, every day’s a revolution  
Welcome to the future  
Hey, look around it’s all so clear  
Wherever we were going  
Well we’re here  
So many things I never thought I’d see  
Are happening right in front of me*

The final verse of the song references President Obama’s election day and highlights how far America has come in the area of civil rights. It also makes references to historical figures Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

*I had a friend in school  
A running back on the football team  
They burned a cross in his front yard  
For asking out the homecoming queen  
I thought about him today  
And everybody who’s seen what he’s seen  
From a woman on a bus  
To a man with a dream*

## **Celebrating America**

### **“It’s America”**

“It’s America,” by Rodney Atkins, was released in 2009 and is an upbeat song about things that are “America.” It celebrates small moments that are part of American life including helping out one’s community, popular music, high school, and summer time.

*It’s cities and farms*

*It’s open arms*

*It’s one nation under God*

*It’s America...*

*There’s no place I’d rather build my life*

It also pays homage to fallen military veterans with the lyrics:

*It’s a big flag flying*

*In the summer wind*

*Over a heroes grave*

This song is clearly portraying blind patriotism as Atkins is singing of his love of the country and cannot imagine living elsewhere, even when things are not perfect.

### **“American Saturday Night”**

Brad Paisley’s “American Saturday Night” celebrates America as a proverbial “melting pot.” It celebrates all of the traditions that we have adopted from other countries’ cultures and how these things now make up America. In addition to celebrating the diverse cultures that make up America, the lyrics also celebrate America’s legacy of a country founded by immigrants.

*You know everywhere has something they're known for  
But usually it washes up on our shores  
My great-great-great Granddaddy stepped off of that ship  
I bet he never, ever dreamed we'd have all this*

### **“Chicken Fried”**

“Chicken Fried” was Zac Brown Band’s breakout sensational song about the things that Americans love. It is seemingly light hearted and carefree citing things like fried chicken, sweet tea, cold beer, and sunrises as celebrated things. The band’s lyrics of seemingly “American” preferences are clearly from a southerner’s perspective and promoting a southern way of life. A similar list from the point of view of an individual native of the west coast or the north has the potential to look completely different. This illustrates country music’s deeply rooted connection with the south.

The bridge shows gratitude to the troops for affording the freedom to experience all of the things that he loves:

*I thank God for my life,  
For the stars and stripes  
May freedom forever fly  
Let it ring  
Salute the ones who died  
The ones who give their lives  
So we don't have to sacrifice all the things we love*

The word choice of the bridge, citing soldiers who have given their lives so American citizens do not have to sacrifice their way of life, has implications that American citizens are



willing to sacrifice soldiers' lives rather than their comfort.

### **Referencing Patriotic Words without Stating Them**

While all of the songs in the sample included a least one of the filter words, there were many instances where the word was referenced or described without being specifically stated. An example of this included Carrie Underwood's "Just a Dream," which describes the funeral of a soldier. Though the word "soldier" is never specifically used, it was inferred that the main character was indeed a soldier based on the following lines referencing a military band and a folded flag:

*She heard the trumpets from the military band...*

*Then they handed her a folded up flag...*

*And then guns rang one last shot*

*And it felt like a bullet in her heart*

### **Blind Patriotic Lyrics**

The majority of those songs exuding patriotic lyrics were coded to have blindly patriotic lyrics. This illustrates that country music more often is unquestionably supportive of America and expresses its staunch allegiance through lyrics.

Additionally, over the past decade, country music has played an important role in garnering patriotic sentiment and support for military action through the blind patriotism expressed in the lyrics. Similarly, country music lyrics role have prescribed what is and is not "American."

An example of a song displaying blind patriotism is Jason Moore's 2009 hit "Small Town U.S.A." This song is about Moore's love of his hometown where he proclaims that he is proud to call it home. It also celebrates the small town, simple life he knew growing up. The blind patriotism is illustrated in the following lyrics:

*I wouldn't trade one single day  
I'm proud to say I love this place...  
Here in small town U.S.A.*

Similar to this song, many others expressed love and pride of hometowns. Additionally, many songs also conveyed regional loyalty by displaying pride in and preference for the country, rural, and Southern living versus big cities.

### **Constructive Patriotic Lyrics**

Songs that contained lyrics that were critically patriotic were far less prevalent than the unwavering songs of support of America. Josh Thompson's single "Way Out Here" was one song that features constructively patriotic lyrics. It contains similar subject matter to "Small Town U.S.A." in that it celebrates a love for life in the country. Conversely, the following lines offer a critical view of the direction of the United States:

*If it was up to me  
I'd love to see this country run  
Like it used to be  
Like it ought to be...*

These lyrics suggest that in his opinion the current direction of the country and decisions of the government may not be the best for the future of America and that the country has

changed from how it was run in the past.

### **Themes of Religion, Faith, and Societal Values**

In addition to patriotic themes, a large percentage of the sample contained religious or faith based lyrics as well as lyrics that upheld societal values. Sixty-one percent of the sample mentioned cultural and societal values and 30% mentioned religion or faith.

The references to religion largely leaned towards Christianity with references to items like ‘Lord’s Prayer,’ ‘preacher,’ ‘Bible,’ and ‘Jesus.’ In the chorus of “Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning),” Alan Jackson even paraphrased a well-known Bible verse from the book of I Corinthians with the following lyrics:

*I know Jesus and I talk to God  
And I remember this from when I was young,  
Faith, hope, and love are some good things He gave us,  
And the greatest is love*

References to faith in general were made with general terms such as ‘faith,’ ‘God,’ ‘Lord,’ and ‘prayer.’ The fact that 35 songs contained some religion or faith based references, show the importance of faith, particularly Christianity, in country music. The fact that Christianity was the only religion specifically referenced illustrates the connection between the genre and this religion. With the perception of country music fans as conservative churchgoers, the lyrics embedded with Christian references are relatable and appeal to country music’s audience. While the notion of Christianity is largely and white, Southern definition of American identity, it fails to describe a social environment that is encompassed throughout other geographic areas of the country.

Furthermore, the large majority of the songs in the sample contained notions of cultural and societal values. This encompassed a wide range of values from family, friendship, hard work, and helping out one's community.

### **Conservative and Liberal Song Lyrics**

The majority of the songs in the sample with lyrics containing political undertones were conservative. Twelve were coded as conservative, only two as liberal, and the rest were neutral or unclear. One song that conveyed liberal undertones was Clay Walker's "A Few Questions." The following lyrics are an example of the liberal undertones:

*Why is one man born in a place where all they know is war  
And a guy like me has always been free...  
It seems unfair to me  
That some get the chance to chase their dreams,  
And some don't*

These lyrics were coded as liberal because they emphasize the desire for equal opportunity for all people. A song that displayed conservative ideology is Toby Keith's "Love Me If You Can." The song is a culmination of his beliefs. The following lines illustrate the conservative undertones:

*I sometimes think that war is necessary  
But every night I pray for peace on Earth  
I hand out my dollars to the homeless  
But believe that every able soul should work  
My father gave me my shotgun  
That I'll hand down to my son...*

These lyrics were coded as conservative because according to Van Sickel's (2005) definition of conservatism they express support for war when necessary, a belief that all able-citizens should become self sufficient, upholds family values, and is supportive of a citizen's right to bear arms.

### **Statistically Significant Relationships between Variables**

Several variables yielded significant relationships after running chi-square analyses on the quantitative data. One significant relationship is the time period and the patriotism category ( $p = 0.012$ ). This means that the patriotism category (i.e. if the songs' patriotic theme was about wartime/armed forces, American dream, celebrating America, or current events) is significantly linked to the time period of the release (i.e. beginning, middle, or end of the decade).

This significance illustrates that the relationship between the patriotism category and time period is not merely a product of chance, however, there is a significant relationship in the category and what time period it was released. The other variable significantly related to time period was the presence of the word 'soldier,' meaning that the time period is significantly related to whether a song's lyrics contained the word 'soldier.' These results are important because whether the song was released in the beginning, middle, or end of the decade had an effect on these two variables of patriotism.

Chi-square results also concluded significant relationships between the patriotism category and the presence of words 'America,' 'soldier,' and the positive or negative attitudes of the lyrics. Thus, the relationship between the words 'America' and 'soldier' are significantly related to the theme of the patriotism in the song and whether those words were present.

In examining hypothesis one, male artists' songs are more patriotic than women's songs, there were significant relationships between gender and the terms 'country,' 'equality,' and 'military.' This implies that the gender of the artist is related to whether those words were used in the song. Since there is significance, the null hypothesis is rejected in these cases.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

Country music lyrics and themes of patriotism are undeniably connected. The results of this study show that popular lyrics containing patriotic content are fairly prevalent in country music. Additionally, the tone of the patriotic messages in country music shifted from overt pro-war anthems soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11, to softer songs depicting the real life of soldiers and consequences of war.

Additionally, congruent with the expected findings, the majority of the lyrics were blindly patriotic which shows that the songs in this period exuded unquestioning support of America. The large percentage of songs with themes of societal and cultural values as well as religious and faith themes show the importance of these values within the country music community.

### Limitations

Although this study successfully identified the prevalence and types of patriotism in popular country music lyrics, there were also some limitations to the research. One limitation was the nature of the sample. While the sample was justified by being ranked as one of the most popular songs of the year, it may have excluded some relevant songs that were never radio singles or songs that failed to gain success on the *Billboard's* charts. By possibly excluding these songs, I may be missing significant data from these songs.

Another limitation of the sample to the research may be the filter words used to select the songs in the sample. While the words generated 90 songs, many of them were still irrelevant to

the purpose of the study. Additionally, there may have been songs patriotic in nature that did not contain the words used to filter the songs, thus did not make it into the sample.

Also, the nature of the content analysis method brings other limitations to the study. While content analyses are effective in revealing the content of the media, this method is unable to prove effects of the media content on society. Thus, this study cannot determine whether by listening to these songs country music listeners are patriotic or if they perceive the songs to be patriotic.

### **Future Research**

This study was able to classify and quantify the type and tone of patriotic messages in the song lyrics of this sample. The findings of this study leave much for future research to explore. Future research should address the effects of this content on listeners. Studies employing survey methods of country music fans' perceptions of the patriotic content of the music and whether they feel patriotic while listening could be conducted in the future to gauge the effect on the listener.

Additionally, future studies should focus on other aspects and platforms of country music artists' patriotic expression. Content analyses of artists' websites and social media profiles would be beneficial to identify in which ways, other than lyrics, artists are engaging in acts of patriotism. Supplemental to this study, a content analysis of music videos of the songs in this sample could be done to determine if there are patriotic images portrayed along with the lyrics.

Furthermore, since this study found a high proportion of songs with religious references a study expanding on the relationship of religion and country music would be a significant research topic.



## **Conclusions and Implications**

Overall, music has the capacity to communicate the things that are important to the artists, listeners, and society. Country music's relationship with patriotism shows that patriotism is a valued and significant sentiment in society. The narrative quality of popular country lyrics throughout the past decade proved that country music lyrics are socially relevant to today's society. Raines and Walker (2008) concluded that country music "has always been, and should remain, poetry for the people" (p. 51).

These songs' captured the patriotic, religious, and societal values of a generation and gave an important glimpse into the opinions and discourse of society. The thematic content of the songs illustrated the strong early support of the war on terrorism in the beginning of the decade and then put a face on the soldiers with softer songs depicting the lives of the soldiers. Finally, the songs portrayed the realities of war by telling stories of fallen soldiers. The songs also captured songs that celebrated American life and the American dream.

As this study established, country music is a valuable medium in which to capture prominent social values and ways of defining American life. Patriotism is connected and intertwined in the lyrics of the songs, personas of the artists, and displayed in many different public ways by the artists and fans alike.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**COUNTRY MUSIC THEMES CODE BOOK**

Song Title: List the title of the song.

Artist: List the artist of the song.

Year on Chart: List the year the song charted.

Position on Chart: List the song's position on the chart.

1. Is the artist/group male, female, or both?
  - a. Male(s) – The artist(s) is a male.
  - b. Female(s) – The artist(s) is a female.
  - c. Both – The group contains both male(s) and female(s).
2. Are any of the following words in the lyrics? (Please check all that apply)

☐ America

☐ United  
States

☐ USA

☐ American

☐ Nation

☐ country

☐ freedom

☐ free

☐ equality

☐ liberty

☐ war

☐ hero

☐ soldier

☐ troops

☐ military

☐ veteran

3. Is reference made to any of the above terms without using the specific words?  
Example: “*Salute the one’s who died, the one’s who gave their lives...*” (“Chicken Fried” by Zac Brown Band)
  - a. Yes – Yes, the terms are referenced without being mentioned.
  - b. No – No, the terms are not referenced without being mentioned.
4. Is a specific American war mentioned in the lyrics?
  - a. Yes – Yes, a specific American war is mentioned.
    - i. If yes, which war? List the American war mentioned in the lyrics.  
Example: Vietnam.
  - b. No – No, a specific American war is not mentioned.
5. Do the lyrics address a government or an elected official by name?
  - a. Yes – Yes, a government or elected official is listed by name.
    - i. If yes, which elected official? List the name of the government or elected official. Example: President George W. Bush.
  - b. No – No, a government official is not listed.
6. Do the lyrics mention a political or government position?
  - a. Yes – Yes a political or government position is mentioned.
    - i. If yes, which position? List the position. Example: President.
  - b. No – No, a governmental or political position is not listed.
7. Are any of the terms listed above mentioned in a patriotic sense?
  - a. Yes – Yes, the terms are used patriotically or to describe “freedom or liberty, democracy, individualism, equality or egalitarianism, law, and the American dream” (Bratta, 2009).
  - b. No – No, the terms are not used patriotically based on the above description.
8. If yes to question 9, does the patriotic nature mostly reflect blind or constructive patriotism?
  - a. Blind Patriotism - Blind patriotism is rigid, unquestioning, inflexible loyalty and attachment to country.

- b. Constructive Patriotism - This form of patriotism enables the patriot to think critically and even disagree with their country or homeland's actions, decision-making, and policies in order to desire improvement for the country.
  - c. Unclear – It is unclear which form of patriotism is being used.
- 9. Overall, is the song mostly positive, neutral, or negative toward America?
  - a. Positive - The song is overall positive in nature toward America.
  - b. Neutral – The song is neither positive nor negative toward America.
  - c. Negative – The song is overall negative in nature toward America.
  - d. N/A – The terms in the song are not referencing America.
- 10. Does the song contain mostly conservative, liberal, or neutral undertones?
  - a. Conservative - Tending to support the interests of a state or society over the individual; favoring regional or local autonomy over national authority; relatively unsympathetic to persons accused of crimes; seek to preserve traditional values, such as the nuclear family, parental authority, patriarchy, and religion; suspicious of government efforts to equalize the distribution of wealth; and normally offer uncritical support for the military (Van Sickel, 2005).
  - b. Liberal - Tending to support the interests of the individual over the state or society; favoring national authority over regional or local autonomy; relatively sympathetic to persons accused of crimes; seek to preserve traditional values, such as the nuclear family, parental authority, patriarchy, and religion; suspicious of government efforts to equalize the distribution of wealth; and normally offer critical support for the military (Van Sickel, 2005).
  - c. Neutral – Lyrics do not lean to either ideology.
  - d. N/A – The lyrics are not political in nature.
- 11. Are there themes of religion or faith in the lyrics of the song?
  - a. Yes – Yes, there are themes of religion or faith in the song. Example: references to God, Jesus, church, etc.
    - i. If yes, explain. Write an example or explanation of religion or faith themes.
  - b. No – No, there are not themes of religion or faith in the song.
- 12. Are there any themes of cultural/societal values?



- a. Yes – Yes, themes of cultural or societal values are present in the song. Example: references to family, regional culture (i.e. Southern), etc.
  - i. If yes, explain. Write an example or explanation of the cultural or societal values found in the song.
- b. No – No, themes of cultural or societal values are not present in the song.

**Reflections:**

Write initial thoughts of the song. Were there items in the song that were not coded for but still relevant? What stood out? What are the themes?

**APPENDIX B**  
**COUNTRY MUSIC THEMES CODE SHEET**

Song Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Artist: \_\_\_\_\_

Year on Chart: \_\_\_\_\_

Position on Chart: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Is the artist/group male, female, or both?

- a. Male(s)
- b. Female(s)
- c. Both

14. Are any of the following words in the lyrics? (Please check all that apply)

- |                                        |                                   |                                   |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> America       | <input type="checkbox"/> country  | <input type="checkbox"/> hero     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> United States | <input type="checkbox"/> freedom  | <input type="checkbox"/> soldier  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> USA           | <input type="checkbox"/> free     | <input type="checkbox"/> troops   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American      | <input type="checkbox"/> equality | <input type="checkbox"/> military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nation        | <input type="checkbox"/> liberty  | <input type="checkbox"/> veteran  |
|                                        | <input type="checkbox"/> war      |                                   |

15. Is reference made to any of the above terms without using the specific words?  
Example: “*Salute the one’s who died, the one’s who gave their lives...*” (“Chicken Fried” by Zac Brown Band)
- a. Yes
  - b. No
16. Is a specific American war mentioned in the lyrics?
- a. Yes
    - i. If yes, which war? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
17. Do the lyrics address a government or an elected official by name?
- a. Yes
    - i. If yes, which elected official? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
18. Do the lyrics mention a political or government position?
- a. Yes
    - i. If yes, which position? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
19. Are any of the terms listed above mentioned in a patriotic sense?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
20. If yes to question 9, does the patriotic nature mostly reflect blind or constructive patriotism?
- d. Blind Patriotism
  - e. Constructive Patriotism
  - f. Unclear
21. Overall, is the song mostly positive, neutral, or negative toward America?
- a. Positive
  - b. Neutral
  - c. Negative
  - d. N/A
22. Does the song contain mostly conservative, liberal, or neutral undertones?

- a. Conservative
- b. Liberal
- c. Neutral
- d. N/A

23. Are there themes of religion or faith in the lyrics of the song?

- a. Yes
  - i. If yes, explain. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. No

24. Are there any themes of cultural/societal values?

- a. Yes
  - i. If yes, explain. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. No

**Reflections:**

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## APPENDIX C

### AMERICANS' IDENTIFYING AS "EXTREMELY PATRIOTIC" 1994-2010

Figure 1

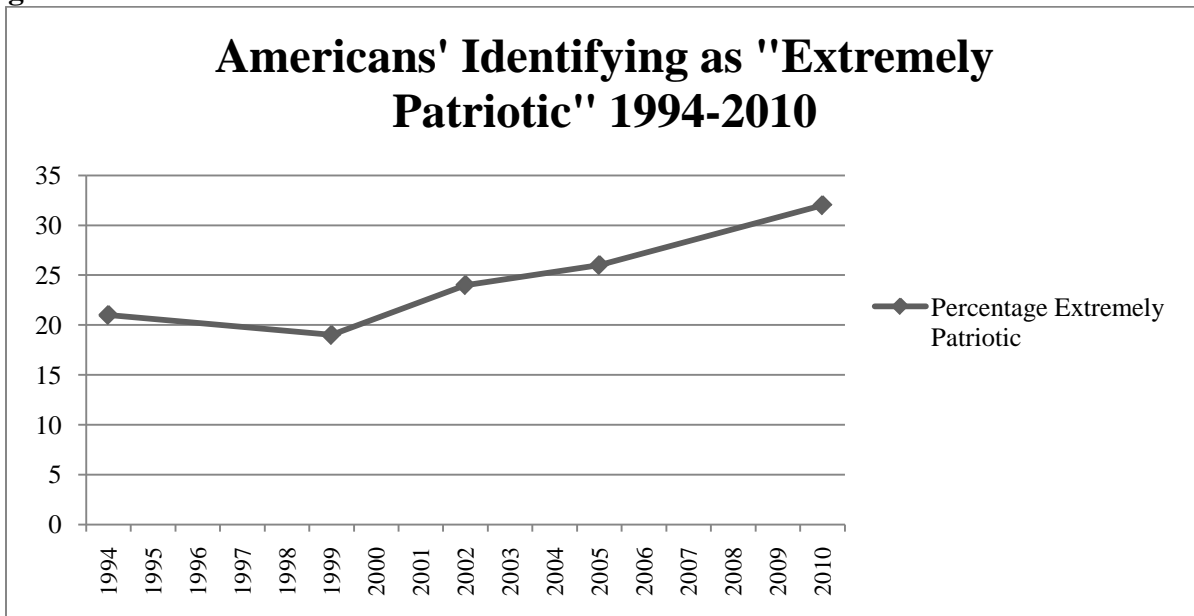
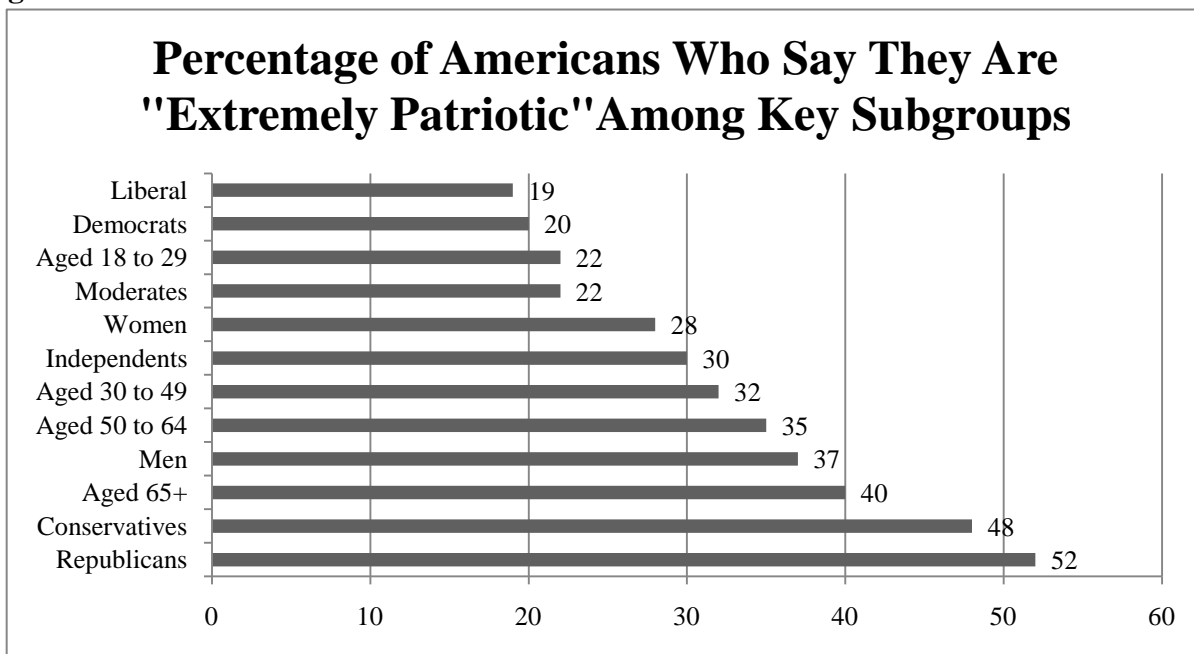


Figure 2



Figures are adapted from Gallup 2010 poll results, "One in Three Americans 'Extremely Patriotic.'"

## VITA

Claire S. Carville is a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the daughter of Steve and Anne Carville. Claire earned her bachelor of arts degree in communication and information sciences from the University of Alabama in 2009. While pursuing her bachelor's degree, Claire completed several internships within the country music industry in Nashville, Tennessee. These internships included Country Music Television's (CMT) country music news-magazine show, *CMT Insider*, The Greenroom PR, and the Country Music Association's Country Music Festival. Upon completion of her bachelor's degree, Claire enrolled at Louisiana State University in pursuit of a master's degree in mass communication, focusing on public relations. While in graduate school, she worked as an assistant at the state of Louisiana's Office of Entertainment Industry Development – Louisiana Entertainment. Claire received her master's of mass communication in May 2011. Following graduation from LSU, in August 2011 Claire will enroll at Tulane University in pursuit of a juris doctorate with plans of working in entertainment law.