Introduction

For better or worse, masculinity and its counterpart, femininity, continue to be concepts that heavily influence the nature and direction of American society. A study conducted by PEW Research Center found that most of its participants believed that most in society look up to men perceived to be masculine (Horowitz 2019). Since the participants were sampled from the society being examined, their speculations imply a confirmation. If most of America believes that most Americans look up to masculine men, then most Americans likely look up to masculine men. Masculinity remains a trait that determines who to follow and who to emulate. Conversely, femininity serves the opposite effect. If masculinity is a factor that improves a man’s image as a role model, femininity remains a trait that can damage it. The perceived inferiority of femininity – and the subsequent superiority of masculinity – can only lead to further marginalization based on gender.

While the definitions and value of masculinity and femininity can contribute to continued sexism, they are not static. They change over time as society continues to evolve. The social meanings of these concepts reflect and are influenced by the culture around which the society is based. Individuals learn the meaning of these concepts through direct socialization with their family and peer groups throughout their lives. These lessons are influenced by institutional agents of socialization like schooling, employment, and religion. However, the representations of masculinity and femininity by these agents of socialization often vary based on factors such as geography. Mass media, however, is an agent of socialization that is not limited by geography and can spread its messages to a wide range of audiences. Of all its facets, music remains a powerful agent of social messaging and influence.

Music can be a powerful agent of socialization. It can be used as a platform to promote ideals and social change. Individuals like Bob Marley and John Lennon have used music to great effect to convey their ideals to the masses. Music can also reflect current societal norms and ideals, such as the meanings of masculinity and femininity. Of the many genres of music, country music has historically depicted masculinity and femininity in a way that reflects the societal norms around them. Country music has historically defined masculinity by hard work and the supporting of a family (Watson and Slee 2019). However, masculinity has begun to be defined by sexual aggressiveness, while femininity has been depicted as subservience to males and sexual objectification. The persistence of toxic and negative gender stereotypes in country music can negatively impact society.

As a popular genre of music, country music has the potential to reinforce sexist depictions of masculinity and femininity in a wide range of adults and to teach them to generations to come, perpetuating gender bias. The continued presence of gender bias in country music hinders the pursuit of a more egalitarian, diverse society. The marginalization of women and girls in society is exacerbated by this, as, currently, women tend to believe that masculinity over femininity is a good trait in role models (Horowitz 2019). This study analyzes the representations of masculinity and femininity in ten of popular country music artist Luke Bryan’s most popular songs. The purpose of this study is to determine if Luke Bryan’s most popular music reinforces negative stereotypes of both masculinity and femininity.

References

Horowitz, J. M. (2019, January 23). Americans’ views on masculinity differ by party, gender and race. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/23/americans-views-on-masculinity-differ-by-party-gender-and-race/

Watson and Amruta Slee for Saturday Extra, J. (2019, July 5). Country music is reflecting a shift in America's masculinity, research shows - Over the past decade in the US, depictions of a hardworking male breadwinner have morphed into a masculinity defined by the pursuit of women, research suggests.. *Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Web Edition Articles (Australia)*. Available from NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current: https://infoweb-newsbank-com.www2.lib.ku.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/1748216B4238F070.