

Summer 2022

Not Ready To Make Nice: A Study Of The Intimate Relationship Of The Chicks' Music And Politics

Danielle Bishop
Fort Hays State University, dnbishop3@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses>



Part of the [Other Music Commons](#), and the [Other Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bishop, Danielle, "Not Ready To Make Nice: A Study Of The Intimate Relationship Of The Chicks' Music And Politics" (2022). *Master's Theses*. 3203.

DOI: 10.58809/WTBD4212

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/3203>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu.

NOT READY TO MAKE NICE: A STUDY OF THE
INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP OF THE
CHICKS' MUSIC AND
POLITICS

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Liberal Studies (Political Science)

by

Danielle Bishop

Bachelor of Arts in English, University of Central Arkansas

Date

7/22/22

Approved

Christopher Olds

Major Professor

Approved

Bill Rogers

Graduate Dean

ABSTRACT

In 2003, Natalie Maines, the lead singer of the band then known as the Dixie Chicks, made a political statement to an all British audience. Her statement was both critical of the Iraq War that America had just entered, and also critical of then-President Bush. The Chicks were immediately blacklisted, with audiences burning the Chicks merchandise and radio stations refusing to play any of the music penned by the Chicks. In this thesis, the causal factors behind this level of backlash will be evaluated. Previous studies have indicated the significant impact of gender and music and how this has an impact on response (Griffiths, 2015; Katz, 2008), but this does not account for why other female country artists at the time, and even beyond, were not blacklisted for behavior that can also be interpreted as political.

This thesis will introduce a four-pronged theoretical framework in which gender, genre, timing, and framing will all be addressed to understand why the Chicks were severely blacklisted for their statements. By comparing the Chicks to male and female artists inside and outside of the country music genre at the same time, the reason the Chicks faced this extreme backlash becomes more clear. The timing of Maines's statements in addition to the aggressive packaging in which she presented these statements also had an impact in addition to their gender in the country music genre. In a time where many were experiencing the effects of the Rally around the Flag phenomenon, much of the country music scene expected its artists to support political institutions. When the Chicks did not, and stepped out of the boundaries given to women especially in country music, they received a shocking amount of backlash.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was made possible with the help of many people's time and effort. A special thanks to Dr. Christopher Olds, my advisor, who spent a lot of time working with me through a few difficult situations with my thesis. Thank you also to my thesis committee members, Professor Ben Cline and Professor Elizabeth Downing-Turner, for reviewing my thesis and providing invaluable feedback.

Also thank you to my parents, Valerie and Michael, my siblings, Samantha and Jonathan, and my partner, Charles Drake, whose unwavering support and patience through this entire process was incredibly appreciated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	2
Music as Protest.....	2
Genres Afford Artists Leeway.....	3
Gender and Music.....	4
Framing.....	5
Timing and the Rally Around the Flag Phenomenon.....	6
CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE STUDY.....	7
Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology.....	7
Research Findings.....	8
DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH FOR THE FUTURE.....	23
REFERENCES.....	26

I. Introduction

Politics and music have been intimately linked throughout time, with artists using music as a statement of identity, protest, or a combination of both. This can be traced back to the very origins of the United States during the Revolutionary War, with examples dispersed throughout the country's history. Artists can and do use music as a powerful tool in order to make a statement. Examples would include the hippie music of the 60s, which spread throughout the Western World as a protest to the Vietnam War, and the American punk rock scene of the 1980s, which happened in the United States as a general protest to society and then-President Ronald Reagan (Mattson, 2019). A notable and specific example of using music as a form of protest was in 2003, when the Chicks, then known as the Dixie Chicks, made a statement to a foreign audience in the United Kingdom establishing their opposition to then-President Bush and the Iraq War (Griffiths, 2015). These actions thrust them into the limelight of severe criticism and established the Chicks, for many, as an enemy to the people and the band's behavior as unpatriotic (Adolphson, 2014).

This case study will focus primarily on how the Chicks, who are in a genre heavily dominated by Conservative-speaking voices, made the decision to break the unspoken rule of never speaking out against the country and its decisions. Rather than backing down in the face of severe criticism, the Chicks returned even stronger in 2020 with their album *Gaslighter*, reestablishing themselves as critical of American society and politics, and dropping the word "Dixie" to highlight the permeating racial inequality the Chicks see within the United States (Yahr, 2020). The theoretical framework that will be applied to the Chicks' actions will be a study in gender, genre, timing, and framing; these interactive variables are key to understanding why the Chicks received severe backlash while their contemporary country counterparts did not.

This moment in country music history was a pivotal moment in America, and laid the foundations for other artists, especially female country artists, to also speak out about topics these artists feel passionate about.

I. Literature Review

A. Music as Protest

Music has often been used throughout the history of the United States as a form of protest as well as a form of individual expression. Numerous studies have highlighted the impact of artists using music as a form of protest, and the significance of creating a safe space for others like themselves to join and feel like they belong to a larger group (Decker, 2019; Harde, 2013; Helton & Staudenmeier, 2002; Mattson, 2019; Street, 2003). Responses to using music as a form of protest have been varied, resulting in different levels of backlash. A noteworthy instance of the intersectionality of music and politics would be when in 2003, Natalie Maines, the lead singer of the Chicks, informed a foreign audience of her opposition to the Iraq War and her embarrassment of then-President George W. Bush being from the same state as herself. Though others had thought that the Chicks had been primarily non-political until this point in time (Fox, 1998), others have indicated that the Chicks' use of stereotypically feminine topics in their music had a subtle element of criticism towards gender and genre (Griffiths, 2015; Katz, 2008).

Griffiths (2015) and Katz (2008) discuss the immediate and severe backlash on the Chicks, and how this backlash was deeply rooted in misogyny. Though research exists that addresses the backlash that the Chicks faced, there is a gap in research that indicates why the Chicks faced the amount of backlash that they did, especially when contemporaries in the genre were expressing their own views of the Iraq War without such severe criticism (Decker, 2019;

Parton, 2005). With the contextual understanding of the theoretical framework here, I will show that not only do gender and genre matter in the case of the Chicks as outlined by Griffiths (2015) and Katz (2008), but also through a political science lens to show how framing and the effect of rallying around the flag play a part in the backlash they faced.

B. Genres Afford Artists Leeway

The Chicks' music is classified as country; though country music started as more liberal with folk music and hillbilly country (Thompson, 2018; Tyler, 2014; Van Sickle, 2005), the genre transitioned through time to expect its artists to have a singular voice that reinforces traditionalist White American values, particularly post 9/11 (Leap, 2020; Meier, 2019; Pruitt, 2019; Tahmahkera, 2011). At this point in time, many in the country music community expected voices to all say the same thing about their support of the country. Though this was not always the kind of country music being made, much of what was expected to be played on the radio contained topics of American solidarity and overwhelming support of the troops at war (Garafalo, 2007). Without additional research, a radio listener may assume that all country music at this time contained stereotypically conservative values.

Other genres of music allowed for a bit of flexibility concerning what was allowed to be expressed in American music post 9/11. Rock has often positioned itself as anti-establishment throughout history (Garafalo, 2007; Harde, 2013), and punk music is also anti-conformity at its core, so both of these genres were unsurprisingly outspokenly against the Iraq War at this time (Cave, 2004; Ali, 2008). Though these artists were singing against the government and its decisions (Garafalo, 2007), they were not facing backlash to the level of the Chicks at this time (Griffiths, 2015; Katz, 2008). In a post 9/11 America, these genres that rock and punk bands exist

in allow more leeway in their political opinions than artists in the genre of country. Within the theoretical framework that is being proposed in this thesis, I will argue that genre plays a significant part in the backlash that an artist faces, along with timing, gender, and the effects of Rally around the Flag.

C. Gender in Music

Women often have to navigate their place within genres, and how this is done varies from genre to genre. As mentioned previously, the Chicks explored stereotypically feminine topics, such as ideas of home and domesticity, as a way to subtly subvert typical ideas of women and femininity in country music (Griffiths, 2015; Katz, 2008; Pruitt, 2007; Watson, 2014). Where men were able to sing in more aggressive ways (Decker, 2019; Keith, 2002), women were expected to sing about relationships, being mothers, and staying at home while they wait for their love to come back (Pruitt, 2007). Because the Chicks, specifically Natalie Maines, broke through this stereotype and spoke freely about politics, she faced a level of backlash that her male counterparts did not (Adolpson, 2014; Griffiths, 2015).

The Chicks were not the only ones around this time who protested misogyny in musical genres, though they were one of the first female country artists of the post 9/11 world to do so. Through the 1990s, third-third wave feminism and the concept of the Riot Grrrl emerged as women were navigating their existence through punk music (Kennan, 2008; Garrison, 2000). The development of the riot grrrl aesthetic through the 1990s highlights the lack of welcome space that women had in punk culture; country is not the only space where women were expected to speak on certain topics and act a specific way. Though currently literature does not exist to connect the two, I argue that Natalie Maines was influenced by third-wave feminism, as

much of her political ideology aligns with third wave feminist ideals; because of her exposure to third-wave feminism, she spoke out on these topics without fear, regardless of the impending backlash that she faced in doing so (Garrison, 2000; Hiatt, 2013). In this way, I continue to argue that gender, genre, timing, and framing have an impact on the backlash that Maines and the Chicks faced following their comments on the Iraq War.

D. Framing

Framing is an important concept in this thesis, and one that applies directly to the Chicks and Maines' presentation of her opinions. Framing is the process by which the media or public figures, including celebrities, package their delivery of a political or current event that can subtly influence the audience's reaction to something (Clawson, Nelson, & Oxley, 1997; de Vreese & Slothuus, 2010). Framing has a direct psychological effect on a consumer, as people develop media-influenced opinions depending on which political news network they choose to watch. Framing can also have an influence on what people choose to purchase when presented with advertisements that encourage different emotional outcomes (Chattopadhyay et al., 2019; Blanco et al., 2017). Framing, then, has an influence on how people react to certain topics, and how musicians intentionally frame their political opinions is no different to this, as protest music can even have an influence on how people choose to vote (Brooks, 2015).

Within the context of Natalie Maines's frame and depending on how a person feels on the subject, they could interpret her statements as using her freedom of speech or, alternatively, encouraging chaos in a time where some believed vocalizing American unity was vital to being an American citizen (Adolphson, 2014; Garafolo, 2007). Many of Maines's contemporaries were expressing similar thoughts about politics and war, but their framing was often different

(Parton, 2005; Armstrong, 2005), and therefore the reaction elicited was different. Though there are studies that show how music can have a positive or negative effect on listeners (Brooks, 2015; Feldman Barrett et al., 2016), there is a gap in study of why audiences react in a certain way to an artist's political opinions, which is a gap that will be filled with this thesis. Framing is an important piece of the four pronged theoretical framework that influences how audiences react to certain frames.

E. Timing and the Rally Around the Flag Phenomenon

Typically, following traumatic events that happen to an entire country, a phenomenon occurs that is referred to rallying around the flag, and the rally post 9/11 was the largest in American history (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003); in this phenomenon, many people begin showing strong emotional support for their president and country as a way to quell anxiety, fear, and even anger, and those who feel differently are often ostracized (Kam & Ramos, 2008; Lambert, Scherer, & Schott, 2011). This rallying effect can often cause people to put differences aside and pay less attention to a sitting president's domestic downfalls and support the president unequivocally. However, if a person did not have trust in government before, the decisions made by government after an event of this magnitude would not necessarily generate trust (Baker & Oneal, 2001; Baum, M., 2002; Baum, M. & Groeling, T., 2008; Chatagnier, 2012).

Within the context of music, many artists were reacting differently to the Iraq War and 9/11; many popular artists in the country music scene were aggressively defending their love for America and threatening to defeat any who opposed America (Keith, 2002; Decker, 2019). On the flip side of the coin, those who already questioned government officials before the decision of war, the Iraq War would likely push them farther from rallying around the flag (Adolphson,

2014; Ali, 2008; Garofalo, 2007; Watson, 2014). The Chicks were blacklisted because of their decision to be vocal about their anti-government views, but other artists of the time were not. Because of the way their opinion was framed and given the timing of their messaging within the country music scene, they were blacklisted in response. Though there is much literature surrounding rallying around the flag and why this phenomenon occurs, there is little that expresses how this can change people's views of others who chose not to rally around the flag, especially in relation to music.

II. Critical Analysis and Comparative Study

A. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The theoretical framework introduced here addresses the independent variables of gender, genre, timing, and music. I seek to prove that the Chicks faced a significant level of backlash because of these four variables. With these variables, there are four hypotheses that I will attempt to prove based on the qualitative study here. A qualitative study is an analysis of given data that is nonnumerical in nature. In this case, I will compare the lyrics or statements of certain artists in various genres and of different genders not long after 9/11 to evaluate the level of backlash they received to analyze why the Chicks received such significant backlash themselves. I will also discuss more modern artists to demonstrate how this framework can be applied to any artist at any time in history.

In this thesis, the Chicks will be compared to Toby Keith, a male country artist who was vocally pro-war and pro-government. The Chicks will also be compared to Dolly Parton, a female country artist who, given certain interpretations of her framing, can be seen as anti-war. Lyrics from Brandi Carlile and Taylor Swift will also be analyzed in comparison; though their

modern critical lyrics are not contemporaries of the Chicks' own controversy, they are female country artists who intentionally choose to package their lyrics and opinions to avoid the same level of backlash the Chicks received. In an effort to find other country artists of the time who were critical of the war, Willie Nelson will also be discussed, and why perhaps the criticism levied at him was not quite as harsh. Pivoting away from the genre of country to highlight how important genre is to this theoretical framework, Green Day will also be included to compare to the Chicks and the level of backlash they both received.

There are four hypotheses that will be attempted to be proven in this thesis. These hypotheses are, to begin with, that contemporary artists in the country genre are expected to be more supportive of political institutions than contemporary artists of other genres. Secondly, female artists are expected to discuss more themes perceived to involve femininity than male artists. Third, female artists are expected to adopt more non-confrontational and non-critical frames about political institutions than male artists. Finally, country artists after the September 11th terrorist attacks had a higher expectation to rally around the flag in support of presidential decision-making than other genres of artists after the September 11th terrorist attacks. In this way, all aspects of the theoretical framework will be addressed within the qualitative case study of the Chicks and other popular artists.

B. Research Findings

The theoretical framework introduced here is essential to understanding why the Chicks received the level of backlash that they did. Each aspect, which are gender, genre, framing, and timing, all have an influence on why they were blacklisted. Artists in other genres do not necessarily face this, and other women in country music do not face the same level of

scrutiny, even when expressing dissenting opinions away from the majority. Each case study introduced here will be analyzed under this theoretical framework to get a better understanding of why the Chicks were blacklisted in the way they were.

In 2003, the lead singer of the Chicks, Natalie Maines, made a statement to an English crowd, which read “Just so you know, we're on the good side with y'all. We do not want this war, this violence, and we're ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas” (Griffiths, 2015). This critical, albeit fairly tame, statement made to a foreign audience was too much for many country music fans and artists. Their music was pulled from the radio, and people began to burn any of their Chicks merchandise (Rossman, 2004). As discussed previously, country music at this point, after 9/11, was a genre that expected and demanded a homogeneous voice in support of the government. Most especially, the genre expected its women to sing about stereotypically feminine topics and stay quiet about politics in general. In this way, gender and genre set up the rest of the theoretical framework within a political science lens; framing and timing also play a part in understanding the level of backlash the Chicks received.

Natalie Maines framed her statement in such a way that there was no question about what she meant. Her statement was firm, to the point, and potentially polarizing to any of her fans that supported the government. She also made this statement to a foreign audience, which could be interpreted by some as betraying her American audience back home. Timing is also an incredibly important aspect of understanding the high level of backlash Maines received. Maines made this statement not long after the Iraq War was announced; America, as a result of this and 9/11, was

experiencing the largest rally-around-the-flag phenomenon in history (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003). For many, her timing likely felt incredibly insensitive, which caused people to immediately rally against the Chicks. Because Maines was navigating outside the topics she was expected to discuss within country music and framed her comment aggressively immediately after 9/11 and the start of the Iraq War, she faced an extreme level of backlash that her contemporaries did not face (Adolphson, 2014; Rossman, 2004). This example highlights and confirms the four hypotheses laid out about genre, gender, timing, and framing in association with music and audience backlash

The traumatic events of September 11, 2001 caused a cultural shift in popular music, and aside from a few outliers, much of the country music of the time was in support of the troops fighting in Iraq, and supporting then-President Bush for his decision to send America into war. Though not all country music at the time was not pro-war, much of what was on popular music stations expressed pro-government sentiment. Lyrics spoke specifically in the tone of the American soldiers and the American military, highlighting the sacrifice made to ensure American freedom (Decker, 2019). Toby Keith, in direct response to the events of 9/11 and to highlight his own Patriotic sentiment in the United States, wrote the following aggressive lyrics in his song, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue":

Justice will be served and the battle will rage
This big dog will fight when you rattle his cage
And 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

(Toby Keith, 2002, Stanza 5).

Within the context of the theoretical frame, Keith is navigating themes he is expected to within country music as a male artist. Male country artists are expected to sing about tough topics in an angry way, especially in defense of the United States. His tone and framing are aggressive, and his comments are expressing what was considered to be a patriotic mindset about America and its culture. Moreover, the timing of his lyrics work for him. Because this song was released within a year of the events of 9/11, his lyrics were well received, and his lyrics may have even been empowering for those experiencing rally-around-the-flag sentiments. Though many country songs at the time were not as aggressive as this song, these lyrics foreshadow the behavior of these same artists and fans, who would react if someone were to say or write something that Keith and many country fans viewed as unpatriotic. This analysis of Keith aligns with the first and fourth hypotheses mentioned above, which are: contemporary artists in the country genre are expected to be more supportive of political institutions than contemporary artists of other genres, and country artists after the September 11th terrorist attacks had a higher expectation to rally around the flag in support of presidential decision-making than other genres of artists. Pruitt (2007) highlights the ways men in country music were expected to sing about more masculine themes and include anger in their lyrics, and this reinforces why Keith did not receive a significant level of backlash as compared to the Chicks.

Continuing to explore contemporary country artists the Chicks, Dolly Parton is an example of a woman who typically sang about stereotypically feminine topics. Parton has always

navigated within themes considered to be acceptable for women. Parton's framing is also incredibly critical to how people have reacted to her. When discussing more political topics, she packages her statements in such a way that highlights her love of people more than actually discussing politics directly. For example, Parton has been outspokenly in support of the LGBTQ+ community, as she doesn't want anyone to feel left out or judged by her, as her religion does not allow for her to judge others (Davis, 2014). This packaging is incredibly important. Though she is expressing support of a topic that would otherwise be made highly political and polarize a large group of her fans, she is expressing her support in terms of her Christianity. Many of her fans, regardless of political affiliation, could agree with her sentiment. Parton has always packaged her statements that would otherwise be political in such a way that would prevent her from facing the same level of backlash the Chicks faced. Because of this, many types of fans can still enjoy Parton's music.

Parton, to address her timing, wrote a song in 2005 called "The Cruel War". The lyrics in this song were packaged in a way that could be viewed two different ways, and she likely recognized that her timing mattered, given the Iraq War:

The cruel war is raging, Johnny has to fight

And I long to be with him from morning 'til night

I long to be with him, it grieves my heart so

(Dolly Parton, 2005, stanza 1)

The analysis of this song within the context of the theoretical framework is essential to understanding Parton's ability to avoid being blacklisted. She is addressing the war in stereotypically feminine ways, which involve her lamenting about a love that she misses. She does not travel outside of what is expected for women to talk about; the feelings she expresses here are those of longing and sadness, not bitterness and anger. Within the lyrics of this song, the meaning can be taken one of two ways, and the framing is intentional for that reason. Depending on the listener's personal opinions, Parton could be singing in support of the troops who are sent over to war. The lyrics in this song can be seen as sympathetic to those who are overseas fighting for America, and therefore the song can be seen as in support of the war. Alternatively, if a listener is not experiencing a heightened sense of presidential loyalty because of the rally-around-the-flag phenomenon, a listener could view this song as critical of the war. The singer's love has been taken from them, and the war is the reason they are gone. Though there was a brief time when critics believed that this song and the album as a whole could be interpreted as anti-war, Parton quickly released a statement indicating that she was "a patriot and peace-loving," which is an intentional frame to avoid controversy (Bierly, 2005). Because of Parton's careful packaging in association with the timing while also keeping her lyrics within the realm of feminine themes, she has avoided the same level of scrutiny that the Chicks faced. This situation reinforces each of the hypotheses listed above; as a woman in country music, she was expected to remain within certain, non-critical themes with her writing, and remain in support of political institutions. With her careful framing, Parton avoids the same fate that the Chicks faced soon after their comments were made.

Another artist in the country genre who was also politically outspoken against the

government was a man by the name of Willie Nelson. Historically, Nelson had always been anti-war as far back as the Vietnam War, where he wrote a protest song against the war. Post 9/11 was no different for Nelson. In fact, he released a song not long after the Iraq War was declared, and these lyrics highlight the sentiment of the song:

We believe everything that they tell us

They're gonna' kill us

So we gotta' kill them first

But I remember a commandment

Thou shall not kill

How much is that soldier's life worth

And whatever happened to peace on earth

(Willie Nelson, 2003, Stanza 2)

These lyrics are framed in a way that is incredibly critical about the Iraq War. Moreover, these lyrics are not up for question about the meaning Nelson is trying to convey. In terms of timing, this was very soon after the declaration of the Iraq War, so the attack of 9/11 was still fresh on people's minds. Interestingly, Nelson did not receive the same level of backlash that the Chicks did for similar statements against the Iraq War. Pruitt (2007) discusses specifically the reaction to Nelson; radio stations simply chose not to play his anti-war song, but continued playing his other songs which were not glaringly political in theme. This situation reinforces not only Pruitt's argument but my own argument, which is that women and men were treated differently in the

context of the country genre. Though Maines's statements were not dissimilar to Nelson's lyrics surrounding the same topic, Nelson did not receive a high level of backlash. Because of his framing and timing of his lyrics, his song was not played on the radio, but he was not blacklisted from these radio stations in general. This highlights a stark difference between the way women and men were treated in the country genre, especially in the early twentieth century. This situation also reinforces each of my hypotheses. Country music artists in particular were expected to rally around the flag where others were not; in this case, Nelson's song was just not played on the radio. He also did not have to frame his comments in non-critical ways, nor was he expected to discuss topics that were more feminine. The lack of scrutiny he received highlights the significant amount that the Chicks received, and reinforces the stark difference between the way women and men were treated in country music.

Interestingly, I was unable to identify a female country artist who, at the time, made significantly anti-war or anti-government statements much like Maines's statement. As discussed above, though Parton's comments surrounding the issue could be made political in either direction, Parton was intentional about her wording, leaving her lyrics fairly apolitical. The reason there were not as many female artists in the country music industry that were making statements like Maines's was likely two-fold. First, there were likely not as many women in the country music scene that agreed with Maines. Many of the lyrics of female singers of the time either were apolitical in nature or, much like Parton above, simply supported the troops who were fighting overseas. In addition to the likelihood that many of Maines's contemporaries felt differently than her, there was also another problem that makes this a two-fold scenario. If a

female country artist had similar opinions to Maines, she likely remained silent for fear of getting blacklisted in the same way. As Griffiths (2015) discusses, men within the country genre had more allowances to be political, even anti-government, where women did not.

Because of this amount of navigation and risk of being blacklisted, many young women are afraid to speak out. Though not the Chicks' contemporary, Taylor Swift is another strong example that can be viewed under the lens of this theoretical framework. Because of her start in the country music genre, many assumed Swift was conservative simply because she sang country songs; in more recent years, she has been outspoken for women's rights, gun control legislation, and support for President Joe Biden, all of which do not align with typical Conservative ideology (Driessen, 2022). Swift herself has indicated that she was afraid to come out with these opinions because of what she saw the Chicks go through, but their recent return to the limelight more politically-charged than before inspired her to use her platform. She even has a song featuring them on one of her more recent albums, indicating her support of their decisions. In a recent documentary, Swift highlights the struggle she felt, because she understands the importance of being outspoken, but also understands the risk of putting her politics online (Neville et al., 2020). Because of this reflection, she even wrote a song about her loss of hope when President Trump was elected:

My team is losing

Battered and bruising

I see the high-fives

Between the bad guys

Leave with my head hung

[...]

American stories

Burning before me

I'm feeling helpless

The damsels are depressed

Boys will be boys, then

Where are the wise men?

(Taylor Swift, 2019, Stanzas 5 & 6)

With these lyrics, Swift highlights the hopelessness she felt at the end of the 2016 presidential election, and how she felt that the America she believed she knew was very different from the America that was in front of her. Within the theoretical framework applied here, Swift is singing about stereotypically feminine themes in this song. This song is a metaphor for the election and watching her candidate lose, but the lyrics themselves are superficially about a high schooler who does not win homecoming queen. These lyrics can be viewed as both stereotypically feminine and packaged intentionally. She does not outwardly address the 2016 election in these lyrics, nor does she make any indications about her political affiliations through this. She sings about what she is expected to, like love and high school experiences about popularity, while

actually addressing something else entirely. Because of this packaging, those who do not care to understand her personal politics could enjoy the lyrics as they are. Alternatively, listeners who understand her politics can understand the song as a lament about President Trump winning the election. Her timing is also important as because this was soon after the 2016 election, she recognized the need to package her words in such a way that were not potentially polarizing.

This reinforces the second and third hypotheses; Swift's lyrics are framed in a non-confrontational way, and though she is being highly critical of the state of politics, she remains firmly within the expected themes of femininity that is expected of her as a woman. Swift's documentary addressing this theoretical framework of gender, genre, timing, and framing, even if she does not specifically discuss framing and timing by name, are an important aspect of understanding why she was not blacklisted in the same way as the Chicks; there were some fans who were disappointed in finding out how she felt about political topics, but Swift still remains an incredibly popular artist regardless of her opinions.

The Chicks had a female contemporary country artist who has become more outspoken as time has gone on. Brandi Carlile, a few years younger than Natalie Maines, started her career in 2004, not long after the Chicks' controversial statement. At the beginning of her career, Carlile stayed quiet about many of the political topics she felt passionate about. Perhaps, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community herself, she was afraid to speak up, lest she face the same response that the Chicks faced. However, as time passed, she became more confident in being outspoken about political topics; in an article with *People*, Carlile indicates that she is a "product of the Lilith Fair" (Nelson, 2019), which was a music festival through the 1990s run by women and featured all-female bands and female singer songwriters. Her modern lyrics

address topics that still continue to be controversial, but she feels that they are important enough to be heard:

You get discouraged, don't you, girl?

It's your brother's world for a while longer

You gotta dance with the devil on a river

To beat the stream

Call it living the dream, call it kicking the ladder

They come to kick dirt in your face

To call you weak and then displace you

After carrying your baby on your back across the desert

I saw your eyes behind your hair

And you're looking tired, but you don't look scared

(Brandi Carlile, 2019, Stanza 3).

Carlile's lyrics here are concerning the 2016 election. Her timing of this is crucial, as many

people who were not happy about President Trump's election felt the way she does in these lyrics. However, Carlile does package these lyrics carefully. Much like Swift, Carlile doesn't explicitly indicate that these lyrics are about any political affiliation, which is likely intentional. If someone were listening to this without understanding Carlile's personal opinions, they might see this as a song about personal, internal struggle after something traumatic has happened. She also talks about motherhood within this stanza, which is a stereotypically feminine topic within country and folk music. While she does navigate outside of topics that are beyond what women were expected to sing about, she packages these topics carefully. Though she may have lost fans as she has become more outspoken and has come out as an LGBTQ+ artist, she is still played on the radio, and has in fact won six Grammy Awards. Her lyrics and subsequent continued success highlight my second and third hypotheses. Though she is being incredibly critical of the American administration at the time of this song's release, much like Swift, her meaning is hidden behind a story of struggle and strength; because of this theme, a listener may not interpret her lyrics as necessarily confrontational. Though her topics could potentially be polarizing, she packages them carefully to avoid significant amounts of backlash.

Another artist of the time, around the same age as the Chicks, was also outspokenly against the war. Green Day's Billie Joe Armstrong, whose album *American Idiot* was written specifically in response to President Bush's decision about the Iraq War, was also incredibly outspoken about how he felt about political topics. Green Day, though not country, was involved with popular music of the time, and was often played on the radio, even after being outspokenly antiwar. Within the context of the theoretical framework introduced here, Green Day's position is incredibly important to include, as genre plays a significant role in the level of backlash an artist

receives for speaking out. Unlike Natalie Maines, no one asked Armstrong to apologize for his behavior, even when his lyrics included more critical opposition. Green Day was not only celebrated for this behavior, but was even rewarded with a Broadway play that was sound tracked by the entire *American Idiot* album in 2009 (Ali, 2008). The title song from the album of the same name, "American Idiot," was written specifically in response to a song by Lynard Skynard, where the band had stated that they were proud to be rednecks. Armstrong was shocked by this, unsure of how someone could be proud of that, and wrote a song differentiating himself from much of the music at the time and the all-American patriotic mindset:

Don't want to be an American idiot

One nation controlled by the media

Information age of hysteria

It's calling out to idiot America

Welcome to a new kind of tension

All across the alienation

(Green Day, 2004, stanza 5 & 6)

Green Day is classified as pop punk music, which is a direct derivative of the punk music of the

80s. The significant difference between pop punk and punk music is that pop punk artists were often signed to a label and did not engage in a do-it-yourself model. Punk music, which Green Day derived directly from, often was critical of the government and society as a whole, so perhaps Green Day's lyrics did not come as a surprise to many critics. Green Day, at the time that the album was released and thereafter, was treated with reverence as an ideal way to protest against the government (Ali, 2008). Though there were likely people who felt negatively about his lyrics due to his timing, Green Day did not face blacklisting the way that the Chicks did. Green Day's level of success reinforces the second, third, and fourth hypotheses discussed here. Armstrong did not feel the need to write his lyrics in a non-confrontational way, nor did he have to stay within expected themes as he is singing. Alternatively, he addresses current politics and the Bush administration head on, being incredibly critical in doing so. Considering the level of success that Green Day had, this also affirms the fourth hypothesis here. Because Armstrong was a punk artist, and especially because he was not in the country genre, he had more flexibility in terms of what he could be critical about. Because he existed in the punk genre, he was not expected to rally around the flag in the same way. In this way, Green Day received a significantly low level of backlash as compared to the Chicks, as Green Day was not ostracized or blacklisted from their own genre.

Within this theoretical framework, the Chicks' high level of backlash towards their behavior was not only because of genre and gender, this also resulted because of their framing and their timing. In order to keep their own backlash low in the country genre, which does not

allow for much leeway in terms of navigating outside unspoken guidelines, women have to package their opinions in a way that prevents them from ostracizing their fans. Though Parton, Swift, and Carlile have similar political opinions to Natalie Maines and the Chicks, their messaging is packaged in ways to prevent polarizing their fans.

In this way, highlighting each different case study is important to understanding why Natalie Maines, and the Chicks as a whole, received the negative backlash that she did. The four aspects of this theoretical framework were chosen intentionally; though there were other aspects that could have been discussed, these are the most relevant to the situation with the Chicks. The Chicks, as an all-female country group who decided to go against the unspoken rule of country music to talk about politics, especially in a way that was anti-government after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. These four aspects matter, as if the statements had been made farther away from 9/11 or framed differently, there may have been a different level of backlash, such as the case of Dolly Parton and her intentional framing of her opinions.

III. Discussion and Research for the Future

Many female artists in popular music have historically been afraid to be vocal about their political opinions. The Chicks, and especially Natalie Maines, were likely influenced by the radical and different ideas they were being presented with throughout the wave of feminism through the 1990s. The Chicks, with their desire to break away from what was expected of them, spoke broadly and shamelessly about their world experience and their criticism of the Iraq war and then-President George W. Bush.

The backlash that the Chicks experienced was a perfect storm of intersectional issues; not only were they facing a lot of backlash because the all-female band was in the country music

genre, they also packaged their messaging in such a way that ostracized many of their fans at a time when rally-around-the-flag was a common phenomenon people were experiencing. Country music artists, especially post 9/11, were expected to homogeneously support the government and the sitting president, and that going against this was seen as unpatriotic. In addition to this, they were women who were deciding to speak out in criticism towards the President. Bands in other genres, such as Green Day, were also actively and aggressively calling out the President for things both bands did not agree with. Not only were these men able to continue writing music and Green Day was played on the radio, they were not forced to apologize for their behavior. The Chicks, in a genre that was primarily against them, were forced to apologize where their male counterparts would not be forced to.

In the future, I would like to continue my research focusing on how race impacts not only audience reactions to certain political opinions and how they are packaged, but also how people of color are able to navigate these situations in different ways to White artists. In general, race was not addressed here simply due to time, as I would not be able to give this topic the complex analysis and thorough research it deserves; race plays an important part for many artists and how people use music as a way to express their identity, and this will be how I plan to research music, genre, gender, framing, and timing in the future.

In addition to this, I would also like to research how the Chicks' actions have influenced other artists to use their platform to be vocal about their own personal politics. Much like Swift, more artists are beginning to express their political opinions, and many fans believe that famous people have a responsibility to use their platform to bring awareness to different political movements (Driessen, 2022). Swift directly cites the Chicks as the reason that she felt brave

enough to speak out, and I would like to do a deep dive on other artists who may have been inspired by the Chicks. Brandi Carlile, a female country artist, did not begin to confidently speak out about her activism until much later in her career, and I would like to research if there is a connection between her and the Chicks's actions.

The Chicks's brave actions of 2003 could be considered a battering ram through the country music genre. Their actions caused drama in terms of the reaction to their actions, but also broke through the gender expectations that women were unfairly being held to, particularly in the country music genre post 9/11. With the influence of third-wave feminism and new ideas, the Chicks were able to be a figurehead for women being brave enough to speak out about their political opinions, regardless of the fear of losing the fame that they had built

References

1. Adolphson, J. (2014). "Mad as Hell": Democratic Dissent and the Unpatriotic Backlash on the Dixie Chicks. *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 26(1), 47-63.
2. Ali, L. (2008). Green Day's 'American Idiot': Arts and Culture in the Bush era. *Newsweek*, 152(25), 52-53.
3. Baum, M. (2002). The Constituent Foundations of the Rally-Around-the-Flag Phenomenon. *International Studies Quarterly*, 46(2), 263-298.
4. Baum, M. & Groeling, T. (2008). Crossing the Water's Edge: Elite Rhetoric, Media Coverage, and the Rally-Around-the-Flag Phenomenon. *The Journal of Politics*, 70(4), 1065-1085.
5. Baker, W. & Oneal, J. (2001). Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?: The Nature and Origins of the "Rally 'Round the Flag" Effect. *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45(5), 661-687.
6. Bierly, M. (2005, October 7). *Dolly Parton Talks Peace*. Entertainment Weekly.
<https://ew.com/article/2005/10/07/dolly-parton-talks-peace/>
7. Blanco, N., Cooper, J., Maddox, W. T., & Mayr, U. (2017). Framing Matters: Effects of Framing on Older Adults' Exploratory Decision Making. *Psychology and Aging*, 32(1), 60-68.
8. Brooks, J. (2015). Mass-Mediated Protest Music and Mobilization: Synthesizing the Civil Sphere's EMM-Framing Theory. *Theory in Action*, 8(3), 1-26.
9. Carlile, B. (2019). The Joke. [Song]. On *By the Way, I Forgive You*. Elektra; Low Country Sound.
10. Cave, D. (2004). Punks mosh for votes: NOFX and Alkaline Trio launch a national

anti-Bush tour. *Rolling Stone*, 948, 9.

11. Chatagnier, J. T. (2012). The effect of trust in government on rallies 'round the flag. *Journal of Peace Research*, 49(5), 631-635.
12. Chattopadhyay, A., Janiszewski, C., Kim, J. C., Price, L., Morwitz, V., Wadhwa, M., & Wang, W. (2019). Unexpected-Framing Effect: Impact of Framing a Product Benefit as Unexpected on Product Desire. *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(2), 223-245.
13. Chicks, The. (2020). *Gaslighter* [Album]. Columbia Records; Sony Music Entertainment.
14. Clawson, R., Nelson, T., & Oxley, Z. (1997). Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance. *The American Political Science Review*, 91(3), 567-583.
15. Davis, B. (2014, May 2). We Will Always Love Her: Dolly continues to speak out for equality. *Glaad*.
<https://www.glaad.org/blog/we-will-always-love-her-dolly-continues-speak-out-equalit>
16. Decker, T. (2019). "I'm an American soldier": Country music's envoicing of military men and families after 9/11. *Journal of Musicological Research*, 38(1), 88-107.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01411896.2018.1564876>
17. de Vresse, C. & Slothuus, R. (2010). Political Parties, Motivating Reasoning, and Issue Framing Effects. *The Journal of Politics*, 72(3), 630-645.
18. Driessen, S. (2022). Campaign Problems: How Fans React to Taylor Swift's Controversial Political Awakening. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 66(8), 1-15.
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lhsu.edu/10.1177/00027642211042295>
19. Feldman Barrett, L., Lynn, S., Quigly, K., & Wormwood, J. B. (2016). Threat perception after the Boston Marathon bombings: The effects of personal relevance and

- conceptual framing. *Cognition and Emotion*, 30(3), 539-549.
20. Garofalo, R (2007) Pop goes to war, 2001–2004: U.S. popular music after 9/11. In: Ritter, J, Daughtry, J (eds) *Music in the Post-9/11 World*. New York: Routledge, 3–26.
21. Garrison, E. (2000). U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub) Cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave. *Feminist Studies*, 26(1), 141-170.
22. Green Day (2004). American Idiot. [Song]. On *American Idiot*. Reprise Records.
23. Griffiths, C. (2015). The Dixie Chicks 2001-2003: The dissonances of gender and genre in war culture. *Media, War & Conflict*, 8(2), 229-243.
24. Harde, R. (2013). ‘Living in your American skin’: Bruce Springsteen and the possibility of politics. *Canadian Review of Academic Studies*, 43(1), 125-144.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.2013.006>
25. Helton, J. & Staudenmeier, W. (2002). Re-imagining being “straight” in straight edge. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 29(2), 445-473.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/009145090202900209>
26. Hetherington, M. & Nelson, M. (2003). Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism. *PS, Political Science and Politics*, 36(1), 37-42.
27. Hiatt, B. (2013, May 30). Natalie Maines: A Dixie Chick Declares War on Nashville. *Rolling Stone*.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/natalie-maines-a-dixie-chick-declares-war-on-nashville-182410/>
28. Kam, C. & Ramos, J. (2008). Joining and Leaving the Rally: Understanding the Surge and Decline in Presidential Approval following 9/11. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72(4),

- 619-650.
29. Katz, C. (2008). "The Eternal Irony of the Community": Prophecy, Patriotism, and the Dixie Chicks. *Shofar*, 26(4), 139-160.
30. Keenan, E. (2008). "Who Are You Calling 'Lady'?: Femininity, Sexuality, and Third-Wave Feminism. *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 20(4), 378-401.
31. Keith, T. (2002). Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American) [Song]. On *Unleashed*. DreamWorks Nashville.
32. Lambert, A., Scherer, L., & Schott, J. P. (2011). Threat, Politics, and Attitudes: Towards a Greater Understanding of Rally-'Round-the-Flag Effects. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(6), 343-348.
33. Leap, B. (2020). A New Type of (White) Provider: Shifting Masculinities in Mainstream Country Music from the 1980s to the 2010s. *Rural Sociology*, 85(1), 165-189.
34. Mattson, K. (2019). Leather jackets for flowers: The death of the hippie and the birth of the punk in the long, late 1960s. *Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics, & Culture*, 12(1), 1-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17541328.2019.1603930>
35. Meier, K. (2019). Looking for Meaning in All the Wrong Places: Country Music and the Politics of Identity. *Social Science Quarterly*, 100(1), 89-108.
36. Nelson, J. (2019, February 10). *Brandi Carlile on Who She's Baking in the 2020 Election: 'I'm Just Lovin' the Girls'*. People. <https://people.com/music/grammys-2019-brandi-carlile-2020-election/>
37. Nelson, W. (2006). Whatever Happened to Peace on Earth. [Song]. On *Whatever Happened to Peace on Earth*. Universal Music Group.

38. Neville, N., O'Malley, C., & Rogers, C. (Producers) & Wilson, L. (Director). (2020). *Miss Americana* [Motion Picture]. Netflix.
39. Parton, D. (2005). The Cruel War [Song]. On *Those Were the Days*. Sugar Hill Records.
40. Pruitt, C. (2019). "Boys 'round Here": Masculine Life-Course Narratives in Contemporary Country Music. *Social Sciences*, 8(6), 176.
41. Pruitt, L. (2007). Real Men Kill and A Lady Never Talks Back: Gender Goes to War in Country Music. *International Journal on World Peace*, 24(4), 85-106.
42. Rossman, G. (2004). Elites, Masses, and Media Blacklists: The Dixie Chicks Controversy. *Social Forces*, 83(1), 61-79.
43. Street, J. (2003). 'Fight the Power': The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics. *Government & Opposition*, 38(1), 113-130. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-7053.00007>
44. Swift, T. (2019). Miss Americana and the Heartbreak Prince [Song]. On *Lover*. Republic Records.
45. Tahmahkera, D. (2011). "An Indian in a White Man's Camp": Johnny Cash's Indian Country Music. *American Quarterly*, 63(3), 591-617.
46. Thompson, J. (2018). Nostalgic for Utopia: Anne Romaine's Folk Music Protest in the New Left South. *Southern Cultures*, 24(3), 45-61.
47. Tyler, P. (2014). Hillbilly Music Re-imagined: Folk and Country Music in the Midwest. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 127(504), 159-190.
48. Van Sickel, R. (2005). A World without Citizenship: On (the Absence of) Politics and Ideology in Country Music Lyrics, 1960-2000. *Popular Music and Society*, 28(3), 213-331.

49. Watson, J. (2014). The Dixie Chicks' "Lubbock or Leave It": Negotiating Identity and Place in Country Song. *Journal for the Society for American Music*, 8(1), 49-75.

www.doi.com/10.1017/S1752196313000606

50. Yahr, E. (2020 July 16). The 'Dixie' is gone. The Chicks are forever. *The Washington Post*.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-chicks-dixie-chicks-new-album-gasli
ghter/2020/07/15/0d76f626-c544-11ea-b037-f9711f89ee46_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-chicks-dixie-chicks-new-album-gaslighter/2020/07/15/0d76f626-c544-11ea-b037-f9711f89ee46_story.html)

**Fort Hays State University
FHSU Scholars Repository
Non-Exclusive License Author Agreement**

I hereby grant Fort Hays State University an irrevocable, non-exclusive, perpetual license to include my thesis ("the Thesis") in *FHSU Scholars Repository*, FHSU's institutional repository ("the Repository").

I hold the copyright to this document and agree to permit this document to be posted in the Repository, and made available to the public in any format in perpetuity.

I warrant that the posting of the Thesis does not infringe any copyright, nor violate any proprietary rights, nor contains any libelous matter, nor invade the privacy of any person or third party, nor otherwise violate FHSU Scholars Repository policies.

I agree that Fort Hays State University may translate the Thesis to any medium or format for the purpose of preservation and access. In addition, I agree that Fort Hays State University may keep more than one copy of the Thesis for purposes of security, back-up, and preservation.

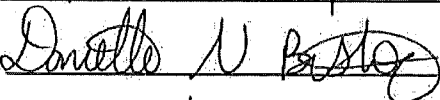
I agree that authorized readers of the Thesis have the right to use the Thesis for non-commercial, academic purposes, as defined by the "fair use" doctrine of U.S. copyright law, so long as all attributions and copyright statements are retained.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, both during and after the term of this Agreement, I agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless Fort Hays State University and its directors, officers, faculty, employees, affiliates, and agents, past or present, against all losses, claims, demands, actions, causes of action, suits, liabilities, damages, expenses, fees and costs (including but not limited to reasonable attorney's fees) arising out of or relating to any actual or alleged misrepresentation or breach of any warranty contained in this Agreement, or any infringement of the Thesis on any third party's patent, trademark, copyright or trade secret.

I understand that once deposited in the Repository, the Thesis may not be removed.

Thesis: Not Ready to Make Nice: A Study of the Intimate Relationship
of the Chicks' Music and Politics

Author: Danielle Bishop

Signature: 

Date: July 22nd, 2022