Problems of Postmodernity and Self-Presentation
Sure Power vs. Unstable Masculinity in Country and Rap Music

My 15-year-old sister was singing a country song the other day as she cleaned up around our parents’ house:

You got your hands up
You’re rocking in my truck
You got the radio on
You’re singing every song
I’m set on cruise control
I’m slowly losing hold of everything I got
You’re looking so damn hot

The lyrics made me cringe, but I didn’t know how to explain it. Feeling especially self-righteous, I made her stop singing. (I know, right?)

I felt strongly that this song belonged in a genre I recognized from other moments of lyrically inspired discomfort, which I might call “criminally patriarchal man-music, featuring beer, women, and trucks.” It isn’t all country by any means—merely a brand of popular country that persists on DFW radio.

My reaction made me realize that I go through life feeling with great conviction that the right thing to do is to train myself and other women around me not to think songs like these are catchy. And if there’s no way around thinking they’re catchy, to recognize the overtones of sexist ownership.

Yet, as my sister wisely pointed out, I listen to rap. How to meld these two feelings into one sensical philosophy?

My chief complaint against this song, as with the other male-led country songs I avoid on the radio, was the performance of masculinity by the lead singer. This isn’t the first song I’ve had to turn off because the combination of vocal style and assertion of control over women/a woman makes me feel somewhat assaulted. The truth is, I have a visceral reaction of disgust—and almost fear, or anger, like that singer is personally harassing me. It’s pretty over the top.

I tried to explain why I couldn’t handle that song, but even I couldn’t account for such strong feelings. Then my sister presented the kicker: “You listen to rap,” she said, “and a lot of that is just as misogynist.”

“I listen to good rap,” I retorted. “I listen to good rap too,” she argued back. “And I listen to good country. But my friends listen to really terrible rap, so I prefer to listen to country over that stuff when I’m with them.”

Okay, I get that, I agreed. “But why do I have such a visceral reaction to country that I don’t get with rap?”

My mom, who occasionally likes country and had now walked into the room, threw out some ideas: “Maybe it’s because you connect the whole genre with reactionary politics.”

“No, it’s more personal than that,” I said, sensing some other root of the problem.

The three of us tried to explain why rappers who are known on Wal-Mart’s CD shelves for being “explicit,” and known in popular culture for saying terribly sexist things, could bother me less than God-fearing country singers who never let out a cuss word and respect their mamas. (Well, everyone’s generally nice to their mama, but you get what I mean.)

After an unnecessarily long philosophical conversation about the difference between rap and country, I think I’ve got it figured out.

I proposed something to our three-person forum: “You know what it is? Rap is about a temporary assertion of power that can be as easily taken away as it was given. And it comes from a young black male perspective, which is an underprivileged perspective in the grand scheme of culture and politics in this country. And,” I added, “There’s something essentially postmodern about it that removes most of the threat. Every song contains multiple perspectives on women, on masculinity, and on the ‘right thing to do.’”

Each thought in a rap song is communicated within a few seconds. In the shift between lines, the song cannot sustain a state of unquestioned control—in fact, the rapper’s very control of the microphone is cast into doubt.

There are still rappers who make me uncomfortable, whose music I have to turn off. But, perhaps strangely, they number far fewer than male country stars, whose appeals to patriarchal instincts are generally passive. It’s true that country
No More “Falling In Love”

Americans should rethink romance, appreciate individual choice

So what did you do this Valentine’s Day? Found love? Entered a romantic friendship? Had a one-night stand? Nothing at all?

Valentine’s Day is now over—the flowers have wilted, the chocolates have been eaten, and the cards have been either displayed or thrown away. And the best news: we’ve all survived!

Now, don’t get me wrong; I don’t hate that holiday, but I do think that framing our experience of Valentine’s Day in terms of “survival” is important and relevant somehow overwhelmed. In framing love as an almost primordial force that blinds us, we remove from ourselves any agency as individuals, deny having individual will when it comes to our relationships, and conclude that we can only “fall” into love.

The way in which love is defined is flawed. As Valentine’s Day would indicate, love is often communicated through money and physical acts (i.e. sex). Even though money and sex can influence interpersonal dynamics much wider and more romantic as dating expenditures increase.

because of the way we conceptualize and experience the day’s focus: love.

Let’s start with some clichés: love is a battlefield, all’s fair in love and war, love lifts us up where we belong. These are fragments of the common ideology that fuels the discourses of love and relationships.

What do these phrases imply? They suggest that the single individual is fundamentally flawed and that a relationship is the only thing that will rescue and redeem us.

Of all these unfortunate expressions, the most prominent and complex is falling in love. This cliché in particular tells us about cultural attitudes toward love and life. Writer and mystic Thomas Merton posits that this expression epitomizes the love discourse as it reflects the “mixture of fear, awe, fascination, and confusion” that seems fundamental to the concept of love (from the essay “Love and Need”). Additionally, it perpetuates what we continue to believe: when experiencing love, we should be swept away and within relationships, they do not necessarily achieve the fulfillment that the individual seeks or that which popular media describes.

American culture commercializes love by following a reductive script wherein love is largely framed as heteronormative (assuming heterosexuality and its implied gender roles as the norm) and more romantic as dating expenditures increase. Beyond suppressing reality, the message offered by Valentine’s Day caters to an unrealistic and self-defeating “true love” ideal. Other forms of love aren’t really recognized and we are faced with a rigid script almost every year: a white man goes after woman with offerings of extravagant gifts; woman accepts his gifts as well as his love; they live happily ever after.

This narrative reduces and commoditizes love by appealing to a capitalistic and patriarchal ideology, setting unreasonable expectations for individuals and perpetuating damaging social paradigms.

The consequences of these paradigms are long-lasting. People may begin to disdain the entire concept of love, which can impede how they generally relate to others. The absence of a successful relationship can lead some to believe that there is no fulfillment in love or that true love does not exist. They reject love because their despair is actually easier to face than the idea that love is a real facet of life, but is absent from their lives.

In response, let’s rethink love. Let’s rethink relationships. We should not conceive of love as something that shall save us from the flawed, deprived state of being single. Love is not just something we find with one soul wandering the earth for our attention.

Love cannot be owned; it is not a commodity. A re-evaluation is in order, one in which love becomes something we can do, an intentional act of will. And along these lines, let’s lay off all the love-shaming on people who aren’t doing relationships “right”—if we want to create Single Awareness Day, society has reached a new low and SAD point (get what I did there?).

[If you have any responses to this article, please send them to Sammy Partida at smuhilltopics@gmail.com.]

“American culture commercializes love by following a reductive script wherein love is largely framed as heteronormative...and more romantic as dating expenditures increase.”
singers are not bad people, and that a lot of country is good. It’s also true that rappers often rap about actively pursuing and controlling women. But the moral universe of country singers, in which no one would ever question or argue the man’s legitimate right to contain, observe, and enjoy his woman, is much more stable and, I would argue, potentially poisonous to a young female mind.

Take this competing example from a Kanye West song. Most of West’s songs I would call “good rap,” not because they’re not sexist at times, but because they lean in a sexist direction, because the song lyrics (even if the (typical) minority rapper, male or female, by virtue of the continued material dominance of white men, and a long history of cultural prejudice. (In other words, it doesn’t matter how much money country and rap stars make off their records today—culturally, white males are privileged with the image of “benevolent patriarch.”)

In effect, the image of the male country star that has taken off in the major record labels is one who is always confident and in control, but passively. If his woman ever hurts him, he is appropriately remorseful and sad, but even this indicates his trust in the reparative road to monogamy to order both of their lives (eventually by his guiding light as husband-patriarch). Country stars usually do not write or sing songs about proving their masculinity, about competing with other people, or about the threat of losing their position of power. The power of the man is assumed—and women who assume such along with them buy into an ideological program that no rapper asks women to buy. Black male rappers, on the other hand, have been fashioned as self-aware intruders in the landscape of white male power. (We might inquire into the involvement of white men themselves in this fashioning.) They often refer to women as also struggling for control and power in a world where it doesn’t come easy, even if this puts them in conflict with men. Rap in general is conflicted, it’s self-aware; it’s offensive, yes—but the meanings in a given song are deliberately destabilized.

The stylistic benefit of rap is that statements made at the beginning of a verse can be reversed by the next, which is where I find much of the entertainment. Wordplay is the means and end of the genre. You can’t pin down an ideological universe that encompasses rap, because the song lyrics (even if they lean in a sexist direction, what with the ubiquity of the male perspective) are constantly in dialogue with themselves. Words themselves conflict and overlap. They even conflict with repurposed records from the 1980s, which surely had a different vibe at original release. Featured performers are another “postmodern” device. (Postmodernism is not the most clearly defined concept, but I’m trying to set apart rap’s attention to situated perspectives on experience/reality from country’s stable value system.) In most rap songs, the primary performer gives up the mic for a few minutes while a new perspective gets the floor. This isn’t done nearly as frequently in country, where the male lead singer usually exercises steady and unselfconscious control over his entire sentiment from beginning to end.

So, I’ve spent more than enough words on this problem of mine. What do you think?

Email us at smuhilltopics@gmail.com to share your thoughts or send responses for us to publish.

Rachel Stonecipher
Co-Editor-in-Chief
Gender Bias in Science Classrooms

As a female student, I would like to believe that gender biases in classrooms are as outdated as the practice of drowning witches to see if they could float. When I asked my physics professor Dr. Cooley however, she handed me an article that proves gender biases exist to this day. When we look at student ratings of professors however, Amy Bug, Etsuko Hoshino-Browne, and Kris Lui from the Spring 2011 American Physical Society Gazette performed a study in which four actors were hired to record the SAME physics video lecture. Two of them were male. Two of them were female. The recordings were then played to students who rated the "professors." Despite having the same intellectual content, statistics from both in the experiment and external real-classroom ratings show that "female students rate female professors slightly better but male students rate male professors vastly better" (APS Gazette 12). As a result, total ratings greatly favor male professors even when applications and qualifications look the same. When questions relate to being knowledgeable and good with equipment, both gendered students tend to rate male professors higher. When asked about professor-student interaction, students tended to vote for professors of the same gender as themselves. In addition, evaluations of female professors tend to include negatively received adjectives normally associated with women such as "nice," "kind," and "nurturing." These words are not negative themselves, but when evaluations lack actually addressing the professor's competence and teaching abilities, the overall evaluation of student evaluations is negative. While these usually do not matter in a classroom setting, they can affect who gets hired for a job opening.

More can be read in the APS Gazette, but the point is that shockingly, even to this day we have gender biases in classrooms. The question then is what should we do about it? Gender biases are so heavily ingrained in our subconscious that they exist mostly without our knowledge. Perhaps being aware of our tendencies and habits then, becomes the first step to preventing them from interfering with each other's careers.

Mayisha Zeb Nakib
Staff Writer

Touch of Pink
By Jakob Schwarz

There sitting in the wings,
Far off in the distance,
Is the chance you never had.
You tried to understand, but nothing comes.

So you try to add a touch of pink to your life
But all you get is a dull white.
Life's tough, isn't it?
You can hear them laughing through the door,
Jesting at the infidelity of your dreams.

You try to forget it ever happened.
How do you forget?
You try to burn the thoughts in your mind
But their derision thrusts you back to the truth.

You never had a chance.

And so you stand up and try one more time.
You're going to do it this time, goddamnit, you just are.
You have to, you're trapped.

We're trapped.
Trapped in a world they created.
Trapped in a dream they conjured.
A dream they forced upon us.
We have to be free.
Free of their perpetual jaded delusion.
We are just as good as they are.

And so we'll keep on fighting them.

We are fading together
Bleeding into ourselves.
The future is our past
We will never go back.

We will never feel
The prongs of fear
Climbing on our backs again.
It's time to come out.
To the pride we feel
It's time to come home.
Because this is our home.

And we will never forget who we are.
We are you.
You are us.

It is the simple message you forgot so long ago
When the splinters of your hate grew stronger.
We won't let you forget that message.
We won't let you forget that we belong together.
**In honor of our theme and out of curiosity, we chose the following books for a brief lit review of LGBTQ issues in young adult fiction:**

**LGBTQ Books**

Crystal Chen, Opinions Editor

*Annie on My Mind*  
Nancy Garden  
**Drama:** A positive lesbian love story: two teenage girls promise to be true to each other despite social pressures that threaten their relationship.

*Luna*  
Julie Anne Peters  
**Drama:** By day, Regan’s brother is Liam; at night, he transforms into his true self: Luna. Regan must adapt when Luna seeks a permanent transition.

*Almost Perfect*  
Brian Katcher  
**Drama:** Sage’s parents won’t let her date. Logan finds out why when he acts on his growing feelings for her: she’s a boy.

*Ash*  
Malinda Lo  
**Fantasy:** When she meets Kaisa, a huntress, Ash’s capacity to love reawakens, but the dark fairy Sidhean has already claimed Ash for his own.

*Boy Meets Boy*  
David Levithan  
**Comedy:** Paul found Noah and lost him; now, he’s playing against 12-to-1 odds of getting him back.

*Hushed*  
Kelley York  
**Drama:** Vivian needs Archer. Evan proves he cares about Archer without any strings attached. As Vivian loses Archer, she blackmails him using his past and present.

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**CALLI, by Jessica Lee Anderson**

*Calli,* by Jessica Lee Anderson, is a refreshingly realistic young adult novel about a fifteen-year-old girl who has two moms and a foster sister, Cherish, who is mean to her outside of the house.

Though she has what is still considered a unique family situation, the story doesn’t center on Calli’s mothers. Calli is teased for supposedly being lesbian herself, but she has a boyfriend. All seems well until she sees him kissing Cherish in the school hallways near the beginning of the story.

One thing I loved about this novel is the strong focus on familial relationships. Calli has a strong relationship with both her moms, and she grows to understand and appreciate the foster system despite her troubles with Cherish. In fact, she grows to understand and appreciate Cherish. As she matures over the course of the story, Calli learns to confront people, to forgive, and to make peace.

Anderson has written a story on learning to be more open and accepting of both yourself and those around you. Rather than honing in on the fact that Calli’s mothers are gay, the book focuses on the universal experience of teen angst, Calli’s relationships with family and friends, and overcoming personal doubt.

Crystal Chen, Opinions Editor
**The Grey**

Dir. by Joe Carnahan  
Starring Liam Neeson, Dermot Mulroney and Frank Grillo  
Review by Rachel Stonecipher

The Grey is a spellbinding and well-directed film, assuming the end product is what Joe Carnahan intended. What he gets is a brutally efficient, and often scarringly so, cinematic representation of the cyclical experience of gaining and losing hope in a situation completely out of one's control.

Entertainment value: A. The aftermath of the plane crash is a sight to behold, and things just get more attention-grabbing from there. If you like action with a hint of very dark, wrenching emotion from every character, rent it. Personally, I don’t think the ending lives up to all of the rich psychological issues preceding it, but it’s worth checking out if you like this kind of thing.

Intellectual value: not horrible. A prototypical wilderness movie, the film introduces early on Neeson's hazy memories of a previous personal tragedy. Even better, his remembrances come with a poem, which lodges itself in the character's and the audience's minds. I'll leave it up to viewers to judge the verse as the movie's philosophical raison d'être.

Visual design: Camera work is great. But the wolves are crucial in this movie, so the producers would have done well to spend more money on their appearance. Better yet, train real man-eating wolves. These vaguely furry, constantly sneering vehicles of yellow eyes could really use some touch-ups to make them look less touched-up. But Liam Neeson can do anything—he may actually fear, and/or possess a vengeful desire to kill, green screens. Or maybe he's just that good.

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**Dear John Gray...**

1. How are you handling the fame?
2. Will you watch SNL when Lindsey Lohan hosts? Why or why not?
3. If you lived on Mars...
   3a. Would you live in a gated community?
   3b. How would you style your hair?
   3c. Where would you vacation?

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1. The calls at 4am on the Virginia-Snider on-call phone asking for autographs are wearing me down. I would also like to take the time to remind people that all requests for personal appearances should be booked through my agent (including but not limited to lunch, dinner, study sessions, endorsements for political candidates, etc.).

2. SNL obviously picked a host that would build “buzz.” After all of her recent struggles and questionable career moves, Lindsay is out to re-prove that she can act. If I recall correctly, this will be Lindsay's 4th time hosting SNL. Her previous hosting outings offered us some classic Debbie Downer sketches and a great Neutrogena commercial parody so there is promise this time around. As long as Lindsay isn’t afraid to poke fun at herself, I’ll be watching. Lohan 2012.

3a. Of course. I want to have a layer of security if the Martians attack.
3b. The way I currently do. John Gray doesn’t need to get ready for Mars, Mars needs to get ready for John Gray.
3c. I greatly prefer the Martian moon Phobos over Deimos. Deimos tends to attract more of the tourist crowd that I try to avoid.

E-mail John Gray your questions at SMUHilltopics@gmail.com.
WORKING DEFINITIONS
This Week’s Word: Oscar

Definitions: Beloved trash can creature; “cash” or “money” (Australian slang); a receipt granted as proof of fame every February; a cichlid fish native to South America; a foolish or ignorant man (rare U.S. slang)

Synonyms: The Grouch, The Anti-Ernie; Hamiltons (see “Lazy Sunday” by The Lonely Island); seafood; Rick Santorum

Antonyms: Ernie, Elmo, Grover

Formal Use: “Meryl Streep is many times Oscared.” (No joke, it’s also a verb.)

Informal Use: “You can call us trash can lids from the way we droppin’ oscars.”

CROSSWORD PUZZLE
Going Greek

Across
3. Largest Latino-based fraternity in North America (3 Words)
5. Poseidon, his trident, and dolphins distinguish these members (3 Words)
7. Blue, Old Gold, and The White Cross distinguish this fraternity (2 Words)
9. Sisters at Baylor famously declared “Our color is blue, and our other color’s blue!” (3 Words)
11. The Purple Panther is the mascot of this multicultural sorority. (3 Words)
14. Green and gold are the colors of this relatively young fraternity (3 Words)
18. More than politics unites Laura Bush and Lynne Cheney due to their affiliation with this sorority (3 Words)
22. Founded at Howard University, this multicultural fraternity shares its initials with the broadcaster of Sesame Street (3 Words)
23. Though different in many ways, Jon Stewart, Tom McGraw, and Joncryfavor Garnet and Old Gold (3 Words)
24. Although it shares its taloned mascot with another sorority at SMU, it alone can call itself the largest member of the National Panhellenic Conference. (2 Words)
25. Yellow, green, and the White Dove define this multicultural sorority. (3 Words)
26. Modeled after an extinct Italian order, this fraternity’s philanthropy supports military heroes. (2 Words)

Down
1. Crimson and Creme are the colors of this sorority, founded at Howard University. (3 Words)
2. The phoenix and the fleur-de-lis fit well with this fraternity. (3 Words)
4. Robert E. Lee spiritually founded this fraternity according to its members (3 Words)
6. Athena and her owl watch over this fraternity, the first to produce a pledge pin and put a man on the moon. (3 Words)
8. Unity waxes rather than wanes among these sisters. (3 Words)
10. Founded as the first of its kind in a school of music, this sorority’s symbol is well chosen given its history. (3 Words)
12. This fraternity builds balanced men on Violet and Dark Red Rose standards (3 Words)
13. The penguin, pink, and maroon are symbols of this sorority, one of SMU’s Hispanic sororities (3 Words)
15. Cooperation makes strength among these brothers, who are not the only SMU fraternity to hail from Ohio. (3 Words)
16. Sisters of this sorority find it quite heavenly (3 Words)
17. Hailing from Austin, Texas, this fraternity sees itself as an alternative to traditional Greek fraternities (3 Words)
19. Although founded in Pennsylvania, these members are more associated with tropical climes. (3 Words)
20. Bronze, Blue, and Pink belong to this “Do Good” sorority (2 Words)
21. Present only at TCU and SMU, sisterhood in God distinguishes this sorority. (3 Words)
American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life at SMU: April 13, 2012

A message from the organizers:

Cancer. We’ve all heard of it. For those of you whose lives have been touched, do you ever wish there was more you could do to support those fighting? Give more than love and support to those with cancer, give them hope. Join the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life on April 13, 2012 on the Boulevard from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. to fight cancer. Just as cancer never sleeps, we won’t either. As the night goes on, the challenge of staying awake and walking the boulevard will grow heavy. But with the support of friends, food, and entertainment, we will overcome this challenge. WE WILL FIGHT CANCER. Come spend the night on the boulevard, take turns walking the track, and never let cancer win. Relay for Life is an experience you will never forget. Envision a world with less cancer, more birthdays, more love, and more celebration. Make a difference. Join Relay for Life today! For more info, please visit www.relayforlife.org/smutx. You can also find us on Facebook or follow us Twitter.

The preceding opinions, dreams, and whimsy belong to their authors only.
This has been Hilltopics: “A magazine for snollygosters.”