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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jenna Michele Lawson entitled ""You're pretty good for a girl": Roles of women in bluegrass music." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music, with a major in Music.

Rachel M. Golden, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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Accepted for the Council:
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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

“YOU’RE PRETTY GOOD FOR A GIRL”: ROLES OF WOMEN IN BLUEGRASS MUSIC

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Music
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jenna Michele Lawson
August 2011

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Abstract

This thesis explores the past and current roles that female bluegrass musicians achieve within the music industry in the United States. Using sociological concepts by Judith Butler, Simon Frith, Mavis Bayton, and, importantly, Thomas Turino's ideas of participatory and communal versus performative and individual, I demonstrate women's complex musical, social, and cultural positions in bluegrass culture.

While women continue to make strides in achieving recognition in the bluegrass genre, society still hinders them from finding complete acceptance alongside male musicians. As bluegrass music is based on patriarchal foundations set by its creator, Bill Monroe of the Blue Grass Boys, female bluegrass musicians constantly struggle to variously actualize and resist this gendered model. Even as bluegrass women achieve success through manipulation of the traditional rules set before them, they continue to struggle against patriarchal foundations and women's historical association with the voice.

Through historical research, personal observations, and in-depth interviews with three female bluegrass musicians, I show that even as these women find acceptance within their own bands, they recognize the unequal musical acknowledgement they receive. With regard to communal and individual performance realms, women, unlike men, have trouble fulfilling positions in both areas. In order to achieve success, some bluegrass women embrace their sexuality and present an overtly feminine image to their audiences.

Notions of tradition, authenticity and hybridity help frame my discussion of women's roles. While the power of tradition and authenticity hinder women's progress in the genre,

concepts of hybridity allow them to branch out from conventions set down by first generation male bluegrass performers like Bill Monroe and the Stanley Brothers.

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CHAPTER I
BLUEGRASS WOMEN: A JOURNEY OF RECOGNITION

Into the Field

Walking the dimly lit street toward Barley's Taproom, my friends and I maneuvered our way over the gravel parking lot, trying to avoid the broken beer bottles and other debris. It was not a usual occurrence for me to venture into the Old City of Knoxville, but one of my favorite bluegrass bands from Lyons, Colorado was performing that night. Inside, the room was dark and poorly lit, except for the stage lighting and the light shining from the bar. About five people sat up front enjoying the music; the rest occupied the back half of the taproom talking or relaxing and drinking at the bar. The Spring Creek Bluegrass Band was already on stage performing. Hearing the music gave me goose bumps instantly; I always get excited when I hear bluegrass music. We each got a drink and sat down to watch the band play their hearts out.

The Spring Creek band has a clear and crisp bluegrass sound, and vocalist and bass player, Jessica Smith, truly embodies the "high lonesome sound" of bluegrass music. As the only female in the band, Jessica occupies a unique position, for bluegrass is a male dominated genre of music. Each member took turns speaking between songs and singing the lead throughout the show. The band played a wide range of songs, by both male and female musicians, from traditional fiddle tunes like "Big Mon" to murder ballads like "Caleb Meyer" written by Gillian Welch. My observations indicated that this group behaved much like a family with Jessica being the sister of the group. Jessica interacted with the band members and worked well with them on stage as though they had grown up together, connecting with each other like siblings. My

observations of Jessica led me to wonder if her role within this band was typical for women in bluegrass music.

My initial exposure to bluegrass occurred during my first semester in college in 2003. My violin teacher suggested I join the university's bluegrass music ensemble. Until this point I had not heard bluegrass music and had only encountered the word itself occasionally. In high school I had taught myself a few Irish fiddle tunes sporadically. Realizing that bluegrass was a genre based on specialized knowledge and ability, I was reluctant to enter into the challenges that this music and culture presented.

At first, I was apprehensive. In viewing one of the ensemble's concerts, I observed that the group featured a lot of soloist and improvisational performing. Stepping out of my comfort zone, I decided to join the bluegrass ensemble, and after one semester I was captivated. I could not believe that I had never heard this music before, while some of my peers had grown up with it in their families. I was almost jealous. Gradually the soloistic and virtuosic aspects of the music proved to be the features that drew me to it.

After some time playing with a bluegrass band, I started to notice, not only in my experiences, but also in my research, clear differences in the way that men and women acted and treated each other. While I believed some of the apparent limitations placed on women could be attributed to factors such as age, upbringing, and the individual personality of each performer, I began to wonder about the role of gender in the group dynamics I saw. My curiosity about the causes for these gender distinctions, along with my passion for bluegrass music, led me to pursue my Master's degree in musicology and to research women in bluegrass music.

Ironically, within the related culture of American folk music, women have served as carriers of tradition and often have performed music in their homes and the private sphere. Even so, women historically have been discouraged in their attempts to bring such music to the public (Wolfe, 2003, p. 133). Reinforcing like notions of traditionalism in bluegrass, Betty Fisher, a bluegrass bandleader from the seventies, states:

> The reason I think there are not many women in bluegrass…is because the men [in bluegrass] tend to be more old-line in their thinking about the role of women…Men in bluegrass music feel differently about women, partly because so many of them come from the sticks and were raised in a traditional way and on old-fashioned beliefs. A woman in the old days used to walk in back of her man. Now the woman is walking with him, but she is still not walking ahead of him (cited in Oermann and Bufwack, 2004, p. 286).

To understand the roles that women have achieved and chosen in their involvement in bluegrass music, I explore issues of social conventions, patriarchal hierarchies, and traditional musical practices. To reveal where women stand in bluegrass music, particular questions must be asked: how do female bluegrass musicians define their own positions with respect to social conventions, musical practices, and desires to change social norms for women? How do patriarchal hierarchies and ideas of capitalism affect their music making practices? How do these women implement change from the inside? Answering these questions opens the doors to women's roles in not only bluegrass music but in other areas of music as well.

Gender hierarchies and social norms create barriers for women in music and place women in bluegrass in specific roles. Although women have gained increasing recognition in the genre, they must work exceedingly hard to reach an equal standing with men. As I will discuss further, this situation has often hindered women's efforts to make bluegrass music a profession.

My research questions the nature of the particular roles for women in bluegrass music and explores how their identities are portrayed and reflected through their music and performance in this historically male dominated genre. Bluegrass subscribes to communal values but, paradoxically, often privileges individuality. Further, bluegrass exists in complex combination and dialogue with prevailing social norms. In particular, bluegrass can both reinforce and resist hierarchical traditions—including gendered, musical, capitalistic, and patriarchal conventions.

Women bluegrass musicians uniquely negotiate these relationships. Through the social practice of performing bluegrass music, they enact and transform typical gender roles and create a sense of personal and communal identity. Although women uphold positions as vocalists, to achieve recognition within the industry, they must manipulate society's given gender roles by increasing their instrumental virtuosity and, in some cases, displaying excessive femininity.

Scope and Parameters

Banjo player Murphy Henry (2004) states that bluegrass since the 1940's has slowly been including more women (pp. 298-299). But an unsteady line still defines where women stand within the style. Largely women in bluegrass have been placed in a delimited role due to gender and social norms. In this study, I investigate the nature of the roles women play within the male-

dominated genre of bluegrass, and assess how their identities are portrayed and reflected through their music and performance. My findings draw particularly from my fieldwork with the Spring Creek Band, Steeldrivers, and Backporch Bluegrass Band. I combine my fieldwork with scholarly approaches in music and social theories, specifically those of Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu and Thomas Turino.

In researching this issue, I interviewed and observed three women in three otherwise all-male bluegrass bands. These women represent differing regional areas and practices: Jessica Smith lives in Colorado, while Tammy Rogers and Linda Bobbitt reside in the southeast. Through our discussions and my observations, I have obtained information on their perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about bluegrass music.

Jessica Smith is the bass player of the Spring Creek Bluegrass Band from Lyons, Colorado and has been a member of this band for only a short time. Jessica began performing music at a young age, including shape note singing and, later, playing the saxophone. Tammy Rogers is the fiddle player of the Steeldrivers based in Nashville, Tennessee, and grew up surrounded by music; she began playing bluegrass in her family's bluegrass band. She has been privileged to perform with musicians such as Reba McEntire and Patty Loveless. Lastly, Linda Bobbitt is the bass player in the Backporch Bluegrass band, based out of North Carolina. Through my interviews with these three women, I gain insight into how they assert their identities, and how they find representation and acknowledgement in today's bluegrass music scene.

Although frequently found in bluegrass music, women generally hold positions as vocalists; they play instruments, and especially lead melody instruments, only occasionally. I chose to interview and observe women who are both string players and vocalists because I am a string player and have related personal experiences in my own performance of bluegrass music. Further, as both string players and singers, my women informants inhabit complex positions within their respective music groups. In particular, the voice is strongly connected to female roles in bluegrass music, whereas the instrumental and technical aspects are understood as strongly masculine. Women like EmmyLou Harris and Rhonda Vincent represent recent exceptions to these norms: both are primarily vocalists, but they epitomize a unique duality by also performing as instrumentalists. The ideal of the high lonesome bluegrass sound further establishes and challenges gender roles in bluegrass; although this singing style is typically male associated, my informants still embody it in their singing. Finally, although women's instrumental virtuosity has been historically infrequent or unacknowledged in bluegrass, my informants Tammy Rogers, Linda Bobbitt, and Jessica Smith personify the ways in which feminine instrumental mastery continues to expand within the genre.

Defining the Genre

Although published definitions generally identify bluegrass as a sub-genre of country music or old-time music, I argue for bluegrass as a distinct genre because of its unique, high energy sound and its virtuosic characteristics, absent from country and old-time music. Bluegrass music does manifest some specific similarities to country and old time music; it also, however, borrows much of its style from jazz, adding to its distinctive qualities.

Understanding bluegrass music's relationships to these other genres substantially informs a discussion of women's current roles in bluegrass. Both country and old-time music operate according to long-lasting precedents for gender roles also present within bluegrass music. Influential figures like Jimmie Rodgers (1897-1933) (see Mazor 2009) and Bill Monroe (1911-1996) (see R.D. Smith 2001) set such gendered precedents by providing iconic ideals of masculinity. Accordingly, in country and bluegrass, women often occupy the background positions in the ensemble, especially as bass players and backup vocalists. Later, women like Kitty Wells (b. 1919) and Patsy Cline (1932-1963) emerged within the country music industry and challenged traditional gender barriers; Pasty Cline represents a particularly important example as a woman who, according to Joli Jensen, in her own way redefined country music Jenson,1993, p. 44).

The improvisatory and soloistic styles characteristic of jazz, along with its musical and technical virtuosity, make up much of bluegrass music's unique musical sound. These elements appear very rarely in country music or old-time music, where, form and melody exhibit a more monophonic or homophonic structure (Malone, 2002, p. 11). On the other hand, as Neil Rosenberg (2005) states,"emphasis on individual virtuosic self-expression led some to call bluegrass the jazz of country music" (p. 3). In addition, like jazz, bluegrass music occupies a specialized rather than purely popular niche within American music genres. Bluegrass also references some ideals of western art music in that the bluegrass musicians with the greatest prestige are those who are understood to possess the most virtuosic skill.

Virtuosity tends to be understood as a masculine trait in many western musical contexts, and both bluegrass and jazz retain this association. Emphasizing a similar phenomenon at work in heavy metal culture, Robert Walser (1993) states, "heavy metal often stages fantasies of masculine virtuosity and control" and "heavy metal articulates a dialectic of controlling power and transcendent freedom" (p. 116). The hegemony and ideal of masculine virtuosity prevents women from partaking fully in bluegrass music because surrounding social norms dictate that their musicianship is not on par with that of the men. In fact, some women have internalized such notions and apply them to their musicianship. With regard to playing in a male dominated genre, Tammy Rogers of the Steeldrivers recalls that during her childhood, men often commented that she played the fiddle "pretty good for a girl" (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009). When asked whether she would prefer to play with an all-male or all-female band, Tammy answered that it pushes her harder musically to play with all men, and thus makes her a better musician. Having been surrounded by male musicians most of her life, Tammy appreciates the extra challenge she finds in playing with an otherwise all-male band; she states, "I always preferred to be in a mixed setting and hold my own with guys" (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009). Her statements suggest that Tammy, through her experiences, has internalized certain gender distinctions within bluegrass culture.

Defining bluegrass as "folk" creates problems in that the use of the latter term and its definition often rely on biases about primitivism or traditionalism. I have considered multiple definitions of the term "folk" music to situate and compare bluegrass music to related genres. Bluegrass parallels old time and other folk music in that it consists of only string instruments,

typically bass, guitar, banjo, fiddle, and mandolin. On the other hand, bluegrass differs from these other categories in its function and transmission. While bluegrass is eclectic and somewhat changeable in its incorporation of genres and styles, folk and old time are typically defined as more consistent or traditional over time, but with occasional regional differences (N. Cohen, 2005, p. 143). Carole Pegg (2011) states that "folk music' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'traditional' music: to distinguish it from art or popular musics" and is often used to accompany dancing. Bluegrass on the other hand fails to fulfill the functional purpose delineated by such definitions of folk music; in particular bluegrass typically features tempos too fast for dancing. Its primary interest lies rather in musicality and the potential for instrumental virtuosity.

Further, Ronald D. Cohen (2003) defines folk music as simple and uncomplicated, with no known author, and passed down from generation to generation (pp. 1-2). Robert Cantwell (2003) comments, "bluegrass differs from old-time music only in its methods...rather than copying particular texts, it attempts to retrieve the entire tradition in a single unitary image, a representation" (p. 194). In other words, Cantwell sees bluegrass music as aiming to gather all traditional styles of music from the Appalachian region and combine them into a new genre that uniquely represents the area.

However, bluegrass and folk are certainly not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Thomas Goldsmith (2004) notes that bluegrass songs are sometimes based on the many anonymous folk songs played during early American history, including traditional styles like fiddle tunes, "emphasizing instrumental virtuosity on fiddle, banjo, mandolin and guitar" (p. 1). On the other hand, unlike the stereotypical "folk song," many bluegrass songs have known

authors and are newly composed. Even as bluegrass has become a commercial genre, it still aspires toward a certain ideal understood as "authenticity." Unlike other commercial styles of music, bluegrass attempts to retain authentic aesthetics and resist, in some ways, becoming commercially popular (Peterson, 1997). Country music, contrastingly, displays a pop music feeling and exhibits a more commercial sound than bluegrass music (Peterson, 1997). From my own observations, bluegrass, although widely accessible, also focuses on a small and specialized audience, more so than more popular genres like country or mainstream rock music. In addition, the much higher vocal range of bluegrass, according to Goldsmith (p. 1), essentially defines bluegrass and distinguishes it from country. Ivan M. Tribe (2011) argues that although country music began as a rural genre, it has since surpassed bluegrass and other offshoots of country, with its stars reaching levels of popularity on par with those of contemporary pop stars.

Ideas surrounding authenticity play a major and often controversial role in concepts of bluegrass music, especially in its relationships to country and old time genres. My own discussions with various bluegrass musicians and listeners reveal that many bluegrass listeners believe that "authentic" bluegrass music is strictly the music created by Bill Monroe and that newer, progressive styles of the genre cannot be classified as bluegrass. Tammy Rogers confirms such beliefs in stating that she does not consider Alison Krauss and Union Station to be strictly bluegrass music; instead she considers them "above the genre" (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009), or a hybrid of several genres.

Definitions of authentic bluegrass vary among performers and listeners, based on perceptions regarding musical genre or style and the gender of the listeners and participants. For

example, Jessica Smith of the Spring Creek Bluegrass Band states that authentic bluegrass consists of all acoustic instruments (upright bass, mandolin, fiddle, five string banjo, and acoustic guitar). She further emphasizes that the banjo must be played in a Scruggs three-finger style[1] and that the musical emphasis is on the back beat; above all, the harmony should evidence the distinctive bluegrass sound (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). As these points make clear, many consider the instrumental makeup and unique sound of early bluegrass as the truly authentic bluegrass.

Methodology

Fieldwork:

As a woman, bluegrass musician, and researcher myself, I find it often difficult to obtain an equilibrium between discussing my research as "insider" as well as an "outsider." Bruno Nettl (2005b) suggests that ethnomusicologists typically study non-western music as westerners (p. 150), thus maintaining an outsider position. The subject of female bluegrass musicians, on the other hand, remains a subject close to home in that I have participated frequently in playing the music and embracing the culture; nonetheless, I remain an outsider to an extent because I did not grow up in the tradition and have only recently discovered this genre of music. I also confront the unique relationships that form each band as an outsider to those dynamics. Immersing oneself in the culture she studies often places the researcher, such as myself, in a challenging position so as not to act or appear to act on preexisting biases.

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[1] The Scruggs banjo style is a varied finger pattern started by Scruggs and unique to bluegrass. As Robert Cantwell (2003) states, "I believe it is fair to say that the Scruggs-style banjo was the first instrumental style unique to bluegrass" (p. 113).

The conflict between the “insider” and “outsider” dichotomy arises constantly in ethnomusicology and Nettl contemplates this struggle in depth. Some ethnomusicological outsiders, according to Nettl, problematically “represent a kind of musical colonialism, manipulating the societies they visit, keeping them from controlling their own musical destiny” (p. 151). Nettl suggests that combining research done by both “insiders” and “outsiders” facilitates the best way to study other cultures (p. 158); his theory requires compromise in order to obtain effective and accurate research material. Taking Nettl’s assertion to heart, I carefully aim to avoid my own biases in my research, while recognizing that true objectivity remains impossible.

Observing and interviewing women of bluegrass music in the field allows for an extensive look at the activities of female bluegrass musicians. Primarily during 2009 and 2010, in Elkin, North Carolina, Bristol, Tennessee, and Knoxville, I observed Jessica Smith, Tammy Rogers, and Linda Bobbitt during performance and spoke with each in an in-depth interview with follow up questions. Throughout my research I integrate observations made from my own experiences with bluegrass bands as both a performer and audience member. With this approach, I interpret the basis and cultural workings of bluegrass culture.

My research utilizes the concept of the fieldnote as well. During and after each of the performances I observed, I took detailed notes regarding what I saw and heard. Gregory F. Barz and Timothy Cooley (1997) illustrate the importance of the fieldnote in his work and within the context of ethnography. According to Barz and Cooley, researchers or “cultural participants” process and write their experiences the way they understand them, an assertion that agrees with

Geertz's arguments (Cooley, 1997, p. 19). Fieldnotes, as the authors describe them, entail more than just a form of writing; they continually demand interpretation. Further, they illustrates the various ways of conceptualizing ideas through different levels of writing. In particular, Barz and Cooley "attempt to locate fieldnotes within an interactive system in which the production of fieldnotes continually affects and re-affects experience and interpretation, both in and out of the field" (p. 222). Thus, the fieldnote acts as a fulcrum, the mediator between the ethnography (the interpretation) and the field research (the experience) (pp. 215-216). In my own observations, I write down fieldnotes during and after performances. From my notes I then accumulate questions to ask my informants. After I interpret the answers to these questions, more questions may arise and the process recurs.

My methodology includes interpreting the interactions and words of my informants. Emphasizing the significance of cultural analysis, Geertz (1973) interrogates how we approach the analysis of our anthropological (or ethnomusicological) observations, looking at how a researcher sorts out the structures of significance (p. 9). These structures of significance, as Geertz proposes, exist in the researching culture as a search for "meaning" rather than behavior, focusing on the interpretive aspects of anthropology (p. 9). Geertz makes the key point, "anthropological writings are themselves interpretations and second and third order ones to boot" (p. 15). Once an interview has been completed, the researcher's ability to interpret correctly what one has collected, in my case women's roles in bluegrass, is of utmost consequence. The researcher does not want to skew the information she is given.

The complexities in discovering the meaning behind this culturally encoded information are substantial. Geertz thus finds the ethnographer faced with "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render" (p. 10). In particular, the ethnographer may understand his or her observations in a rather different way from how the informant or the culture being studied sees itself. As Geertz states, "descriptions of other cultures are *already* interpretations of their [the researchers] interpretations" (p. 15). Through these various mediations, the real meaning behind activities or beliefs of a given culture may be lost.

Gender:

I approach the idea of women and their roles within bluegrass music from various angles. In particular, I investigate issues of gender, identity, marketing, geography, and historical legacies in regard to women and their places within bluegrass music. Common preconceptions that position the male gender as the norm and that construct the feminine against the masculine translate directly to issues surrounding women's participation in bluegrass.

The 1940s saw the initiation of bluegrass music as a male dominated genre. Bluegrass music was started by Bill Monroe and his "hyper-masculine" all-male ensemble (Hardwig, 2001, p. 40), the Bluegrass Boys, in 1936. Folklore scholar Neil Rosenberg (1985) states, "Bill Monroe was and is the central figure in bluegrass" (p. 18). Dubbed the Father of Bluegrass Music in 1970, Bill Monroe's music was built on the hillbilly and old time musics of the 1930s (p. 18).

Due to the initial make up of early bluegrass bands, most bands retained Monroe's gender model; examples include the Del McCoury Band and the Stanley Brothers (Goldsmith, 2004). Further, in studying masculinity in bluegrass music, Bill Hardwig (2001) states that Bill Monroe fuses music with other conventionally masculine competitions, such as baseball, a pastime Monroe loved. Monroe's synthesis creates a distinct idea of a "boys only club" within bluegrass (p. 40). In many cases, this "hyper-masculine image" still exists and challenges women who seek entry into this historically male arena.

Following Judith Butler's (1999) concept that gender is a performance, I investigate gender issues in bluegrass music. Butler approaches gender in society as culturally constructed. Emphasizing the skewed meanings of gender, Butler argues that gender involves more than the difference between masculinity and femininity (p. vii). Butler also warns that biased presumptions about gender, reinforced by misdirected feminist theory, can intensify rather than mitigate gendered differences. She says, "feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion" (p. viii).

Further, Butler defines the term "female" and emphasizes two differing ways to interpret the word--as an anatomical sex or culturally constructed gender. Frequently, and in music especially, "female" takes on both these definitions. In bluegrass culture, as this thesis will make evident, both cultural constructions of gender as well as anatomical difference can define the concept of "female."

In Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 for example, I discuss certain culturally constructed aspects of gender in Appalachian traditions and common perceptions about musical instruments and their

relative value. Here I liken the instrumental hierarchy to gender's role in society and the way in which it has created what Butler calls a "sexual hierarchy" that "produces and consolidates gender" (p. xii). Butler also suggests that gender hierarchy promotes gender normativity (p. xiii). From attracting a mate, to getting a job, society forcibly makes women act out social gender expectations.

Western sexual hierarchy places the male gender at its pinnacle, creating a schema in which, according to Butler, "only men are 'persons', and there is no gender but the feminine" (p. 26). Butler insinuates, "identity is an effect of power relations" (p. xixx). With the male gender as norm and the female gender as "other," a situation arises that reinforces the construct of gender hierarchy. Butler implies, "identity is an effect of power relations" (p. xixx). Longstanding gendered power relations relegate women to an inferior position and describe the female gender as unstable (p. xixx). Agreeing with this idea, Renée Lorraine (2001) sees the same concepts at work in western European art music. Lorraine states that in the 18th and 19th centuries, "some operatic music associated a sensual or powerful woman with tonal instability, an instability that was resolved only when the woman was killed or reconciled with social norms" (p. 4).

In bluegrass, sexual hierarchies prevail in many instances. For example, Connie Walker, "wife of New Grass Revival member Ebo Walker" (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 17), notes the sexual hierarchy that exists at bluegrass festivals. Walker states that typically men at bluegrass festivals play in jam sessions long into the night while the women stay at the campsite and hold down the

fort and watch the children (Walker, as cited in Goldsmith, p. 191). This division of activity confirms the social identification of women as domestic caregivers.

Chapter 4 on the other hand focusses on notions of female as identified with women's bodies, and includes a discussion of women's bodies as a site of commercialism in the music industry. Historically, in country music, women dressed and acted according to culturally prescribed codes while performing. Bill Malone (2002) states that early twentieth-century female country bands like the Coon Creek Girls, were supplied "with old-fashioned songs, and required to dress in homespun costumes" (p. 121). These homespun costumes probably incorporated a drab dress and apron, which physically signaled the woman's place as at home, taking care of children; women's physical roles primarily included nursing their children and caring for their families. Further, wearing homespun and dingy clothing covered female anatomy and helped to desexualize women in an environment that valued women's chastity.

On the other hand, dressing outlandishly like Dolly Parton, for example, accentuates female anatomy. For some viewers, Parton's choices carry negative connotations. However, overt sexuality and hyper-femininity can also be an articulation of female agency and power, as I discuss further in Chapter 4.

Ultimately, however, the mentality that emphasizes difference between men and women in a male dominated world restricts women from reaching higher level positions within various professions; Music business and performance conventions incorporate this inequity. Society defines gender and therefore defines the "culturally prescribed" woman.

Engrained in the way we live, gender exists because society has created it. In regard to gender as a performance, Butler (1999) argues that although gender encompasses an "internal essence," "what we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures" (p. xv). Society facilitates these gestures and bodily acts as the norm. People perform their given gender because of the dictates of society; such conventions establish and reinforce concrete expectations for distinctions between males and females.

Marketing:

Patriarchal or male-dominated organizations, along with capitalistic concepts, remain key components of contemporary American society in many respects, especially in the music industry. David Downing (2008) defines capitalism as an "economic system in which private individuals (or groups) use private capital (money or other forms of wealth, such as machinery) and labor to produce goods and services" (p. 52).

Capitalism's role in the music industry and record companies, especially in the popular music scene, causes most decisions to benefit the controlling company rather than the artist (Negus, 1997, p. 40). These businesses are generally owned and run by men, as Keith Negus (1992) confirms when he notes that women usually obtain booking positions and lower administrative roles in the music industry (p. 86), but rarely rise to roles of authority and leadership. Mavis Bayton (1998) similarly states, "within the record industry, women disproportionately occupy positions of lower pay, status, and power, at the bottom of the hierarchy, doing unskilled and semi-skilled manual jobs, and routine office work" (p. 2).

Although women partake in various aspects of the bluegrass music industry, they represent a minority and are undervalued.

In bluegrass music, women behave as both consumers and producers. The notion of woman as strictly a music consumer in genres such as rock and western European music does not translate to bluegrass music. For example, Mavis Bayton (1998) states that women usually behave as fans in the context of rock music culture, an assumption that coincides with women functioning as consumers and not producers (p. 37). Considering gender from a performance standpoint, Bayton (1998) interrogates the specific roles that women play within the rock genre, and why so few perform. She concludes that in rock culture, gender roles define women strictly as consumers (p. 37).

On the other hand, in bluegrass, while women act as consumers, they also importantly act as producers. Their role in production separates, identifies, and defines women in bluegrass as distinctive from women in other genres of music. One of many successful bluegrass women today, Alison Krauss, not only sings and plays the fiddle in various genres, but also produces other bands. As I discuss in Chapter 4, interestingly enough, Krauss' success continues to cause conflict in bluegrass circles regarding traditional vs. contemporary lines of thinking in bluegrass music.

Unlike genres like rock and pop, bluegrass often shuns the mass market. Music and its connection with the mass market illustrates a common issue in musicological studies. Simon Frith, among other scholars, has developed significant ideas regarding popular music and the music industry. Frith (1981) contends that there exists a "distinction between music conceived

with no reference to a mass market and music that is inseparable from the mass market" (p. 6). Frith also states, "rock is a mass-produced music that carries a critique of its own means of productions; it is a mass-consumed music that constructs its own 'authentic' audience" (p. 11).

However, Frith's distinction does not apply to American folk music or to bluegrass music. Because bluegrass does not identify as mainstream, it targets a specific market, but not necessarily the mass market. L. Mayne Smith (2004) states, "the participants [of bluegrass], be they general audience, special *aficionados* of bluegrass, or professional musicians, conceive themselves to be members of essentially the same, rural-and-blue-collar, Southern-based social group" (p. 255). This idea illustrates that bluegrass music leans toward a specialized audience, with a sense of communal identity aligned with southern regions of the United States and rural classes. Although he does not state so directly, Smith's comment also suggests a presumed white male identity; indeed, bluegrass traditionally exists as a white male dominated genre of music.

In many areas and communities within the United States, people have never heard of bluegrass music, and their preconceptions about bluegrass reinforce the validity of Smith's claims. From my own experience, mentioning the term bluegrass to those who have never heard it usually involves describing it as a kind of hillbilly music or folk music; often times the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* (2000) functions as a reference. For many then, bluegrass is not only a music genre but also marks a very particular class, race, geography, and gendered culture, namely that of the white, male, rural southeast.

In bluegrass, as well as other genres, marketing enacts power relations, as scholars like Judith Butler (1999) and Martin Stokes (1994) have outlined. Stokes suggests, "performance is a

vital tool in the hands of performers themselves in socially acknowledged games of prestige and power" (p. 101). He also emphasizes that although the music industry has its "games of power," the performers find other financial, spiritual, or emotional benefits through their performances. French sociologist and anthropologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) addresses this idea of power relations throughout his work and locates them within a political realm. I discuss this idea more fully in Chapter 3.

Identity:

Music in many aspects represents one's identity and listeners find definitions of themselves in the music they listen to. As Robert Walser (1993) argues, "music is intimately involved with crucial feelings of identity and notions of community" (p. xii). People usually listen to or perform a certain kind of music because it speaks to them in some way. Walser also states that popular music prevails as the place where most find "dominant definitions of themselves" (p. xiv). Similarly, Daniel Cavicchi (1998) incorporates self identification with music in his research of Bruce Springsteen fans and confirms that Springsteen's music shapes the experiences and perceptions of his fans (p. 109). These examples illustrate how people often find social definitions of themselves in popular music.

These examples, particularly Cavicchi's studies, also suggest a sense of communal identity and experience. In this respect, there occurs a direct correlation between the Springsteen fans and bluegrass fans in that both groups show devotion to specific bands. Similarly, Hazel Dickens' connection with her audience illuminates this sense of community through song. Received with open arms, Dickens' (2008) songs like "Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her

There" brought many feminists together to fight for women's rights in the 1970s. Dickens' lyrics expressed the female audience members' concern with domestic violence; for example, Dickens sang, "You pull the string, she's your plaything, you can make her or break her it's true, you abuse her, accuse her, turn around and use her, then forsake her anytime it suits you" (p. 19). Such expressions of the female experience helped to crystallize women's solidarity.

Popular music's great accessibility and variety allows for many people to identify with it easily. The definition of popular music variably but broadly includes mass production, a sphere from which bluegrass often seeks to separate itself. For Richard Middleton (2011), however, popular music need not necessarily rely on mass production. Rather, to label something as popular links "popularity with social group – either a mass audience or a particular class (most often, though not always, the working class)." Commonly associated with the working classes, bluegrass music fits this definition of popular music. In terms of bluegrass music, linking popularity to a specific social class relates to the audience's ability to identify easily with the music. Bluegrass music locates itself broadly with a specific class of people, that of the rural southeast. On the other hand, bluegrass' popularity with this particular audience still separates it from the mainstream idea of popular because bluegrass focuses so greatly on maintaining authentic ideals. Rather, bluegrass' popularity relies on the idea of a collective communal identity, individual virtuosity, and an emphasis on authenticity.

But accessibility is not the sole reason people identify with music they listen to or perform. In my observations and discussions, many bluegrass listeners and performers identify with bluegrass music because its topics pertain to the southeast region of the United States,

whose culture many bluegrass fans know from personal experience. Examples of such topics include a variety of relatable trials and tribulations associated with this area, including financial troubles, political conflicts, the commercialization of the south, and aspects of religion (H. M. Lewis, 1986, p. 230). In this respect, bluegrass shares commonalities with country music.

Regarding accessibility and gender, bluegrass vocalist Dale Ann Bradley maintains that the genre remains more popular with women than with men due to the stirring quality of the music: "I think bluegrass music is so emotion-filled, more than any other music…it has captured women's attention. That's what reaches out and touches women: emotion" (cited in Oermann, 2004, p. 282). Reinforcing a common gender stereotype, Bradley's interpretation suggests that women only appreciate bluegrass because as "emotional" beings, they connect with fervent music, while men enjoy the music for more rational reasons. As one of the many aspects people enjoy about bluegrass music, sentiment draws my informants to the music, but along with the other unique qualities bluegrass possesses. My research suggests that the raw emotion of bluegrass music does in part attract its female listeners; many can easily identify with song topics ranging from the troubles of domestic abuse, to loving mothers and their children, or happily married couples. Yet, many women find bluegrass appealing for its musicality, technical skill, and virtuosity too.

Performance:

An important determinant in women's acceptance in the bluegrass arena depends on the performance setting. Thomas Turino's (2008) concept of participatory versus presentational in music correlates directly to bluegrass music. As applied to bluegrass culture, participatory music

equates to communal relations whereas the presentational mode translates to individual ideals and activities. Turino's differentiation emphasizes this distinction, stating that in participatory music "individual virtuosity is downplayed" whereas in presentational music "individual virtuosity is emphasized" (p. 59). Specifically in bluegrass, the participatory aspect can exhibit a relaxed and collective atmosphere. On the other hand, the presentational aspect of bluegrass carries substantial weight and status, and demands more structure and competition. Focussing on communal aspects, and not specifying gender differences, Michelle Kisliuk (1988) addresses bluegrass jam sessions as a time when family, friends, band members and others come together to perform bluegrass music (pp. 142-143). Thus Turino's concept would suggest that women can perform without difficulty in participatory or informal settings like bluegrass jam sessions.

Depending on the participants, the relative lack of virtuosic and soloistic need in participatory music allows women to partake in communal gatherings, but often in a limited fashion. Jessica Smith states:

> if it's a bunch of people on stage and we're doing some throw together jam with a different band and they ask so-and-so to sing tenor, I'm like man I can sing tenor better than that, but they want a certain sound and that's something honestly that I envy, in the music...of not being a guy...which sounds silly (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6 2009).

In the professional bluegrass arena, women encounter hardships due to lack of virtuosic ability, a perception thereof, or gendered expectations.

Review of Literature:

Bluegrass music, a relatively new genre, began in the 1940s and the interest in playing and studying this music has increased greatly over the pass few decades. My research indicates that extended scholarly writing on bluegrass music began only in the early 1970s, starting with Steven Price's (1975) book *Old as the Hills: The Story of Bluegrass Music*. Many such early writings about bluegrass music strove to define bluegrass as its own style.

Scholar Neil Rosenberg has contributed substantially to the literature of bluegrass music, particularly with his prominent work *Bluegrass: A History* (1985). The book reveals two main focuses. First, Rosenberg seeks to identify bluegrass's place in the world of music, specifically how bluegrass fits into folk music traditions and popular music culture. Second, he considers whether or not bluegrass music establishes itself as a fully distinctive style, distinguishable from other genres. His question surrounds the term "bluegrass" and how fans and scholars, as opposed to insider musicians, use the word (p. 5). In his investigation of these issues, Rosenberg looks extensively at the history of bluegrass music, starting from its beginnings with the Monroe Brothers and their bluegrass band.

Unlike Rosenberg, Stephanie P. Ledgin's (2004) book, *Homegrown Music: Discovering Bluegrass*, adopts an ethnographic research approach and includes interviews with prominent bluegrass musicians. In her introduction, Ledgin brings to light the importance of bluegrass music and its communal qualities. She also treats the controversy surrounding notions of true bluegrass music. By focusing on the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou*? she discusses bluegrass, misperceptions regarding it, and its newly rejuvenated popularity.

Thomas Goldsmith's (2004) *The Bluegrass Reader,* unlike the others, compiles various essays on the subject of bluegrass music: bluegrass' beginnings and Bill Monroe; bluegrass festivals; and women and their recognition at the International Bluegrass Music Awards. Goldsmith has a very concise definition for bluegrass music:

> It is an expansive, twentieth-century, acoustic string-band music based in traditional styles, including fiddle tunes, blues, and southern church music, and it features high-pitched lead and harmony singing and emphasizes instrumental virtuosity on fiddle, banjo, mandolin, guitar, and acoustic bass (p. 1).

This definition positions bluegrass music as unique as compared to other American traditional music styles. Further, it emphasizes the high-pitched lead, harmony singing, and the concept of instrumental virtuosity, all of which distinctively represent bluegrass music and create a specific imprint that bluegrass musicians instantly recognize.

Like other scholars, Goldsmith discusses briefly the history of bluegrass's personnel and the major players within the genre, including Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, Flatt and Scruggs and Bobby Osborne. He breaks the history of bluegrass into chronological sections: 1939-59: The Big Bang; 1960-79: The Reseeding of Bluegrass; 1980-2000: Another Roots Revival, A New Crop. Each section of the book features a collection of essays, encompassing topics ranging from early bluegrass, to the folk revival and its renewed interest in bluegrass music, to women musicians and the lack of recognition they receive for their hard work. With regard to the last, the essays in Goldsmith's book acknowledge that, with the changes that bluegrass has recently undergone, women feature more prevalently within the genre.

Unraveling the uncertainty of women's positions in bluegrass, Murphy Henry (2004) focuses on the cultural changes that bluegrass music has undergone since its beginning. This article seeks to understand the most common roles for women in bluegrass music performance--as singers or as instrumentalists. Henry discusses women's history in the performance of Appalachian music by focussing on women as novelty acts, women traveling with men and related stereotypes, and the struggles women have endured in the bluegrass music industry.

Acoustic Aspects, Instrumental Virtuosity, and the High Lonesome Sound:

Neil Rosenberg (1985) weaves his way through the history of bluegrass music and the characteristics the genre encompasses. The words he uses to describe bluegrass music include "hillbilly" and "country and western" and he positions it primarily in the rural upland South. While he offers a multifaceted definition, he asserts that bluegrass' most important aspect is performance on "acoustic-non electric-string instruments" (p. 6). These instruments include guitar, fiddle, banjo, bass, mandolin, and, recently, the dobro, also known as a resonator guitar. Hesitant to consider the dobro an official bluegrass instrument, early bluegrass musicians avoided it (p. 79) and those who follow the strict guidelines set by Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys, see the dobro as inauthentic. Some perceive the incorporation of a new instrument into a strong tradition as drawing bluegrass music farther from its origins.

Much scholarly literature, like that of Rosenberg, defines bluegrass as an acoustic genre. In fact, Ledgin spends the first chapter of her book discussing this definition. While she elaborates upon it, her essential definition of bluegrass minimizes the music's unique identity by positioning it as an outgrowth of country music:

> Bluegrass is considered an outgrowth of early country, grounded in string band music and derived from Southern rural—both white and black—folk traditions. Its principal identifying features lie in its vocals, all acoustic instrumentation, and instrumental virtuosity (p. 1).

Although bluegrass includes instruments similar to those used in country, it borrows more from the old-time and European traditional music conventions.

Rosenberg, Ledgin, and Goldsmith thoroughly discuss the distinctly unique vocal styles of bluegrass. Neil Rosenberg (1985) defines bluegrass' high pitched singing and "preferred vocal tone" as a "'clear' or 'cutting' or, sometimes, 'piercing'" style of vocalization (p. 7). Further, this vocal style, as Rosenberg states, persists as "the direct legacy of Bill Monroe's singing style" and is commonly described as having a "high lonesome sound" (p. 7). Due to this high lonesome sound, bluegrass situates women as inadequate lead singers because they cannot duplicate the style and sound accurately. Interestingly enough, Jessica Smith of the Spring Creek Bluegrass Band acknowledges this limitation on women singers, even as she wishes to challenge it. She states, "But I'll never sound like Bill Monroe, or Danny Paisley or one of those guys" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009).

Women in Bluegrass Music

Bluegrass music operates according to a set of underlying gender criteria—both spoken and unspoken—that identifies women as not "real" bluegrass musicians. Women find themselves ignored due to their lack of conformity to the genre's criteria of virtuosic instrumentals, and high lonesome sound. Some women excluded from bluegrass' written history in fact played with Bill

Monroe, and their importance for establishing the bluegrass genre remains under-explored in contemporary scholarship.[2] The women missing in bluegrass' history clearly met at least one of the criteria that typically define bluegrass music, either the acoustic aspect or the virtuosic. But bluegrass music, based so strongly in tradition, may require fulfillment of all these aspects and even then refuse to recognize women in the genre, due to the strength of ever-present gendered perceptions. Goldsmith explains:

> It wasn't easy for women to enter the field, dominated as it was by the patriarchal figure of Bill Monroe. Singers in particular ran into the musical conservatism of bluegrass, which dictated that certain songs had always been performed in certain keys and should not be changed just to suit the vocal range of a woman (p. 27).

Thus, in many cases, female musicians attempting success in the bluegrass arena meet only the criterion of being acoustic musicians, without meeting the expectations for producing the high lonesome sound, or displaying virtuosic instrumental skill.

As I discuss further in Chapter 3, women have historically lacked the opportunity to develop virtuosic skill on an instrument, one of the essential characteristics of bluegrass music. Instead, many female musicians--both past and present--sustain the role of the singer and strum a guitar as accompaniment while they play. Examples include Sara and Maybelle of the Carter Family (although Maybelle did have a guitar technique named after her), Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerard, and Emmy Lou Harris, among others.

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[2] Even in literature dealing specifically with Bill Monroe, the few women who played with him are scarcely mentioned. Sally Ann Forrester, who played accordion in his band a short while, warrants further study (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 40). More information can be found on the women of Monroe's band in Rosenberg (2007) and R. D. Smith (2001).

However, by acting more assertively or gaining greater acceptance from men, women today have assumed new musical positions and remain increasingly involved in the masculinized roles of playing virtuosically. Thus, women find larger recognition as instrumentalists and virtuosic performers in bluegrass music today than they did in the past. Jessica Smith states:

> I think that especially right now, at this moment, women are making themselves known as instrumentalists. Like I said, Kristen Scott Vincent, winning banjo player of the year and Sierra Hull being so young and being nominated for mandolin player of the year, along with Sam Bush and Ronny McCoury and all these people. I mean, it's pretty incredible (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009).

As women gain recognition as instrumentalists they conform less to the historical stereotype of being capable only as vocalists, and redefine women's abilities in bluegrass.

Although Rosenberg (1985) discusses bluegrass music extensively, he rarely, if at all, acknowledges the subject of women in bluegrass music as a topic worthy of independent discussion. Occasionally he mentions a female musician, but only in circumstances that tie these women to male musicians, as band members or family members; examples of these women include the various female members of Monroe's band such as Bessie Lee Mauldin, Monroe's temporary bass player, and Wilene "Sally Ann" Forrester, who played accordion with him occasionally (pp. 62, 203).

Ledgin (2004) provides more detail about women in bluegrass music than Rosenberg does, but still rather little overall. In an early section she discusses all-women bands like the Buffalo Gals (which started in 1990), but dismisses these women as marginal bluegrass

musicians because they played other styles of music like swing and jazz. Later, discussing traditional musics more broadly, she mentions the importance and popularity of the autoharp and the guitar among women, thus relegating women to a specific secondary role. In a more extensive discussion, the section entitled "Not Just Bluegrass 'Boys,'" (lasting about two and a half pages), Ledgin overviews the contribution women have made to the bluegrass genre despite the resistance that men have historically expressed toward women's participation. Ledgin's examples of women significant to bluegrass history include Molly O'Day (1920s), Sara and Maybelle Carter (1930s), fiddle player Wilma Lee Cooper (1950s and 60s), and more currently Dolly Parton (1967-present) and Patty Loveless (1970s-present).

Ledgin's discussion of the crossover that many women make from country music to bluegrass music illustrates an interesting aspect behind the stories of these "pioneering women" in bluegrass. Ledgin's idea, which I find debatable, suggests that women should establish themselves as country musicians before crossing over into bluegrass. A start within the country genre, however, would place women immediately and primarily into a vocalist role, as in the case of Dolly Parton (Lewis, 1993). From my own observations, most women in country music position themselves as vocalists more than as virtuosic instrumentalists. Similarly, Jessica explained that while on tour, audience members often times approached her saying, "'oh are you the singer?" because they assume that you know a girl wouldn't necessarily play an instrument, its usually she's the singer or whatever" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). The focus on instrumental virtuosity in bluegrass music makes the idea that women can simply jump from singing in country to participating in bluegrass quite questionable. The crossover from

country music to bluegrass in Ledgin's examples relies on circumstance, marketing, and personal preference more than on any natural transition from country to bluegrass.

Nevertheless, the women included in the scholarly histories of bluegrass music typically have crossed over from country music. With the exception of Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard, women who are most often included in the written history of bluegrass music come from backgrounds in country music. The quantity of women musicians who began in country music prior to crossing to bluegrass suggests that women can step relatively easily into country music. Their crossover into bluegrass, however, generates problems of definition and perceived authenticity of genre. Although such crossover women produce bluegrass material, their lack of instrumental virtuosity and roles as vocalists, combined with bluegrass' own strong adherence to traditions, historically diminish such women's involvement in the genre.

The ease of musical crossover for those women who have successfully transitioned between styles revolves around the mainstream quality that country music has and bluegrass lacks. Although country music has its own gendered constraints for women, they more frequently find success in country music. Further, in their efforts to crossover, country women have already gathered followers, making their transition to bluegrass smoother. Although not a complete crossover, the Dixie Chicks provide a contemporary example of women transitioning in the opposite direction, from bluegrass to country music. As Goldsmith (2004) points out, "the Dixie Chicks brought bluegrass instrumentation, at least, into the forefront of the mainstream country music scene in the later 1990s with their use of banjo and fiddle and-–maybe as important—of music videos" (p. 27). An avid bluegrass listener such as myself would not consider the Dixie

Chicks a bluegrass band and would instead label them as a country band. Even though the Dixie Chicks incorporate bluegrass instrumentation, their music does not present the distinct vocal styles and the instrumental virtuosity of bluegrass.

Goldsmith's (2004) collection addresses the progression of bluegrass music from its creation to the present and the changes it has undergone along the way. The constituent articles address specific musicians, issues of domestic limitations, exclusion of women, and debates regarding equal opportunities for women in bluegrass music. The contributions by Connie Walker and Robert Oermann and Mary Bufwack discuss the domestic limitations imposed upon women. Similarly, the article by banjo player Murphy Henry explores issues of equal opportunity for women in bluegrass and argues that women should receive equal recognition for their contributions.

Scholarly work on country music allows for a cross-genre analysis of bluegrass and its other musical counterparts. Bill Malone (2002) covers the vast history of country music and its origins beginning with the 1920s. He discusses the formulaic qualities of country music, which contribute to its great popularity among music lovers. Malone primarily focuses on specific characters in country music's history while touching on issues of commercialism, the music industry, gender, and audience-performer relationships.

Most beneficially, Malone expresses the importance of women in country music and discusses gender issues involved with women's participation in the genre. Malone makes clear that although women are infrequently acknowledged in country music's history, they definitely exist within the genre and they have helped to shape it. He discusses women such as Sara and

Maybelle Carter as well as others who played quite large roles in country music. Malone points out that men did not eagerly accept women as competition in public (p. 22), or in the home. Like my bluegrass informants do, these women tried to make a name for themselves in country music by whatever means they could. Malone states that these "women assume equality as a natural right and have increasingly struck out to assert control over their careers" (p. 432).

Throughout the next four chapters I seek to discover the roles women currently hold in bluegrass music and how these roles coincide with or differ from those that men have historically achieved. Further, I question the reasons that these women continue to struggle for equal recognition in their work. Chapter 2 addresses the historical background of bluegrass music and bluegrass' allegiance to traditionalism. Chapter 3 discusses gender and social norms as they pertain to bluegrass music, the communal and individual aspects of the music, and the gendered perceptions of instruments within the genre. In Chapter 4, I explore ideas of capitalism, marketing, production and consumption, as well as image and sexuality in bluegrass music and how bluegrass women navigate through the obstacles of the music industry. I conclude with my thoughts on these various topics as they pertain to bluegrass music and its gendered ramifications.

Chapter Outline

While the roles played by contemporary female bluegrass musicians demonstrate certain new or modern aspects as compared with earlier traditions, many of their activities and much of their reception remain rooted in a much older history. Chapter 2 describes bluegrass music's past, its conventions, and the various historical and musical influences from which bluegrass draws it

sound. This importance of traditionalism in bluegrass locates women's historical roles and their ties to bluegrass culture.

Bluegrass developed as a less commercial form than did country music, and remains strongly entrenched in southern society's ideas of authentic and customary folk music. Drawing on the research of music historian Bill Malone, geographer Deborah Thompson, and sociologist Barbara Ellen Smith, I demonstrate how traditionalism drove both the content of bluegrass music and women's roles within Appalachia. This history addresses women's activities within the various realms of which music was a part, realms such as home, church, and travel on the road.

Still cemented in music to this day, the power of convention and authenticity of folk music in the southern United States prevails. In bluegrass, fixed perceptions of gender roles remain powerful. Deborah J. Thompson (2006) emphasizes these customary ideals:

> Representations of the Appalachian region's music often reinforced gender expectations, as women are associated with the tradition of ballad singing, the gentle sounds of the dulcimer, religious and family-based music, while men are more connected to the virtuosic instrumentalism of bluegrass music and the rambunctious and somewhat morally suspect dance music and calling (p. 73).

In many cases, these concepts remain instilled in the mindset of older generations of bluegrass musicians.

Together, my women informants experience a range of more traditional and more contemporary roles. Tammy Rogers, is a virtuosic fiddle player and singer. Jessica and Linda occupy more typical positions for women; both are singers as well as bass players. In these

capacities, both perform as lead vocalists, one of the more accepted positions for women and one that coincides with women's roles in country music. They also perform key background functions as bass players, whereby they dutifully hold the band together.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how women within bluegrass experience restrictions in terms of both communal and individual needs and recognition. Women's communal and individual involvement in bluegrass music and the gendered interactions they encounter both on and off stage expose gender and social norms. Performing as both instrumentalists and vocalists influences their acceptance in these realms. In particular, as instrumentalists, women find acceptance in the individual realm and as vocalists they achieve acceptance in the communal realm. Thomas Turino's (2008) ideas regarding participatory and presentational music translate well to women's roles in bluegrass. Here, participatory music represents communal/social music, especially exemplified by singing. Presentational music delineates a more individualized and personal musical experience, specifically through virtuosic instrumental playing. Bluegrass demonstrates communal properties in many respects, ranging from the necessity of group participation to communities arranging local jam sessions. Yet, at the same time, the genre also enacts individual properties in that the music represents virtuosic and soloistic performance ideals.

Participatory music, for example old time music, exhibits a relaxed and collective sensibility whereas presentational music involves a more structured and competitive character. Tying into the communal and social versus individual and soloistic ideas of bluegrass music, my informants and their male band members interact socially very much as a family. But the music

industry itself and the musical expectations of bluegrass as a genre still present many challenges to women as individuals. Gender norms and distinctions remain engrained in society and affect all aspects of the music industry.

Using Turino's concept, I suggest that women can perform in informal settings or bluegrass jam sessions without difficulty, whereas in the professional bluegrass arena women encounter more hardships due to either real or perceived lack of virtuosic ability, along with gendered expectations. In this duality, the three bands I have observed a conflicting relationship between communal and individual ideals. The individual and soloistic features appear, for instance, in that Tammy displays extremely virtuosic fiddle skills and has a keen ability to sing harmony; she achieves as close to the "high lonesome" sound as most women can reach. Jessica's remarkable ability to sing lead with a powerfully strong voice, as bluegrass as Bill Monroe, also displays the soloistic qualities of the music.

Since the music industry has historically been a male dominated profession, many women to this day find it difficult to obtain success within the presentational mode. Chapter 4 explores how women in bluegrass navigate the many obstacles of the music industry, including marketing, production and consumption. I draw on scholarship by Sheila Whiteley (1997 & 2000), Robert Walser (1993), Marion Leonard (2007), Leslie Gay (1998), and Simon Frith (2007). Part of the challenge for women comes from the organization of the music industry, which remains based on hierarchal, patriarchal and capitalistic ideals. Even though women have now made it further in the music industry than they ever have before, awards ceremonies like the International Bluegrass Music Awards (IBMAs) have yet to produce more than a few female

winners (http://www.ibma.org/, 5/12/2010). Playing into the gender roles of bluegrass music, an examination of marketing and production approaches demonstrates how these women promote and represent themselves to the public. Such choices in turn shape and bring to light how the public consumes their music. For example, many women such as Rhonda Vincent self consciously change and perform an excessively feminine image in order to increase their sales. Vincent "glams" herself up in somewhat revealing and flashy clothing, instead of presenting the wholesome country look typical of many women of early country and bluegrass (Vincent, 2006).

Bluegrass in many ways proves a male dominated genre, and to this day, women struggle to take their place within it. Women find difficulty in obtaining recognition for their hard work currently, even though situations like bluegrass jam sessions, along with nominations for Best Female Vocalist and Instrumental Performer of the Year at the IBMA awards, help to validate women's worth.

Chapter 5 offers my concluding thoughts on the above mentioned topics and women's place within the bluegrass music industry. Based on the traditional music of the southeastern United States, bluegrass music holds true to the gender roles and social norms dictated by society. To this day, Bill Monroe's model persists as the basis for bluegrass ideals. Monroe lived by a socially traditional gender code. This gender code in turn propagated ideas that the woman's place existed in the home and the man provided for his family. And musically, instrumental music exhibited men's talents whereas women epitomized the vocal realm. Women exemplified a supportive role within men's musical careers and because of social norms, situated themselves in the domestic arena.

In early country music, and later in bluegrass, feminist movements inspired gender roles to shift as women discovered a newfound confidence in themselves and began to reveal their talents to both genres. Bill Malone's discussion (2002) of women in country music asserts, "the good old girl has no appeal to country women today. They increasingly ignore the roles once prescribed for their gender, and they look and sound like pop performers in both visual and attire and vocal style" (p. 432). This observation continues to pertain to bluegrass women, but does not address the full complexity of the situation.

Searching for answers in bluegrass music's history shows that women occupied minor and overlooked roles at the genre's beginnings. Although women displayed their musical talent in the home with family, society denied them opportunities for musical expression and visibility. The few women who appear in bluegrass musical history generally performed in family bands with male supervision.

The music industry and media have allowed for women to find success in bluegrass. Due to their "new grass" sound and glamourous clothing, women like Rhonda Vincent and Alison Krauss have popularized bluegrass among new audiences who generally would not have listened to the music. On the other hand, older generations, mostly men, remain loyal to the traditional sound. In many respects, women have taken hold of new roles in the genre and have begun to make their presence known more than they ever have. While bluegrass in many ways proves a male dominated genre, women currently find ways to take their place within this style of music.

CHAPTER II
"YOUR ROOTS ARE SHOWING": BLUEGRASS AND ITS FOUNDATIONS

Appalachia--the region, its culture, and especially its music--has fascinated outsiders for decades. While the roles played by contemporary female bluegrass musicians demonstrate certain new and modern aspects as compared with earlier traditions, many women's activities and their reception remain rooted in a much older history. Even as women have achieved some feats of success, patriarchal society continually reinforces gendered notions. George H. Lewis (1993) has argued that sex roles significantly changed for women in country music during the 1970's. But, prior to the 70s revolution, American society relegated women to distinctly secondary roles. While bluegrass stemmed from, and to an extent, remains rooted in traditionalistic notions, by the mid-20th century women found ways to break free of such gendered restrictions.

Social conventions of gender demonstrate a clear grounding in the historically gendered and religious beliefs engrained in early American society (Lewis, 1993). Such beliefs carried through from 19th-century Appalachia, through the dawn of bluegrass music in the 1940s, hindering female bluegrass musicians from prospering equally to men in the genre.

In some ways, the mindset of many southeastern communities has changed since the 1940s when bluegrass began. On the other hand, many religious, rural, and traditional social patterns remain in place. As a result, female bluegrass musicians still struggle to achieve musical, financial, and social equity with men in the bluegrass genre, especially in the southeastern U.S. While achieving innovations and musical success in various ways, the modern female bluegrass

musician still must confront traditional, social, and communal ideals of the rural, conservative south.

This chapter considers the social roles that women have historically held in Appalachia, and the parts these play within bluegrass. First, I discuss the rural lives of women in the Appalachian region and how early songs like murder ballads portray women. Second, I demonstrate women's roles in religion, including the great importance that music held in southern churches. Finally, I look at specific women who have had substantial influence on early Appalachian musical genres, and bluegrass in particular. I focus on how they accomplished their desires as well as their effects on gendered conventions within the genre.

Rural Life and the Woman's Place

Due to its underlying patriarchal foundations, discussing women's roles within Appalachian scholarship creates challenges as women infrequently appear within related historical works. Barbara Ellen Smith (1999) discusses the deeply rooted masculine traditions that women encountered in early Appalachian history. She emphasizes, "those who make the attempt [to write Appalachian women's history] must come to terms with implicitly gendered constructions of Appalachia and narratives of regional history that feature men as the determinant actors" (p. 1). With men continually represented as "determinant actors," women have frequently been written out of American and Appalachian histories. Thus our ability to extract information about Appalachian women proves difficult. Nonetheless, we can piece together a picture of the restrictions placed upon women over the course of Appalachia's social and musical history.

Society historically restricted women's modes of expression by limiting their musical involvement to the home. Thompson (2006) suggests, "women's musical spaces tend to be malleable, supportive, and reactive rather than proactive and creative" like those of men (p. 73). Therefore, their musical practice has been manipulated by patriarchal hierarchies forcing them to perform only in the private sphere. They historically sang for friends and family but rarely in public (or for profit), as I will elaborate in Chapter 3.

Contrary to Thompson's statement, Appalachian women do not exhibit only supportive qualities, but contribute actively to the region's culture. Historically, as well as today, within the home women perform proactive and creative activities, whether it be through cooking, sewing quilts or knitting scarves for their children (Lewis, 1986). Although this kind of creativity differs from the musical talents required in bluegrass music, these pursuits have allowed women to assert their own voices and their own means of expression within society.

From the first settlers through portions of the 20th century, the image of the woman as the homemaker prevailed as the common and acceptable role, often seen in early Appalachian traditions in both music and everyday life. According to Shaunna Scott (1994), most scholars agree that "historically, Appalachian households have been patriarchal, with men functioning as 'household heads,' owning land, directing production, disposing of income, and making decisions" (p. 230). Expectations for women revolved around their eventual marriage and raising a family. In the home, ballads, sung as entertainment, emphasized these roles and warned young girls of what could happen if they strayed from given norms.

Opposite to the homemaker was the loose and uncontrollable woman, also depicted in regional ballads in which stereotyped female characters often died a gruesome death. Norm Cohen's (2005) discussion of folk music illustrates how women often appear in songs as lesser beings and how male singers historically removed references of premarital sexual acts from songs. The stories in these ballads brought over from Europe were sung by parents to warn children, usually girls, of the consequences of being foolish and irresponsible. When the sexual content of the songs remained, like in the ballad "Pretty Polly," the singer obliged himself "to add another stanza, accusing Polly of having a shady reputation to justify the murder (her murder)" (p. 113). On such misogyny in traditional ballads, Cohen states, "murdering a sweetheart, rather than marring her, is the basis of so many American ballads that foreigners must wonder whether this is our nation's pastime" (p. 116).

Historically, women also held importance outside the home in Appalachian life, most significantly through their roles in the coal mining regions. Appalachian women showed their proactive attitudes during the coal mine strikes in the middle 20th century (Porter, 2002). These women stood up for their husbands and families during the hardest of times.

Even while women found important roles outside the home, they struggled to retain these positions. Author Helen M. Lewis (1986) assembled various personal accounts that discuss the hardships endured by Appalachian women. Many of these women were expected to uphold their prescribed roles while their husbands enjoyed a great deal of freedom. The author details the experiences of a housewife named Carol in the 1960s who unusually broke out of the gender mold by pursuing an education (pp. 6-8). Feeling her life wasting away in her marriage to an

unfaithful husband, Carol decided to enroll in classes to receive a better education; Carol graduated in 1985 with a degree in business (p. 7). As Carol's story shows, even in the late twentieth century, Appalachian society dictated that women stay at home and care for the children, whereas their husbands enjoyed freedom to do as they pleased. But, even though society dictated her role as such, Carol grasped the opportunity to break the mold and work for an education, bettering herself and seizing her own independence from a male dominated society. As I discuss further in Chapter 4, bluegrass women have taken hold of their roles as well, resisting traditional gender norms, and with a variety of results.

Aural/Oral Tradition and Women's Learning

Before Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys took the songs we now know as bluegrass music and played them at overdriving speeds, these regional tunes circulated in small communal areas (Ritchie, 1955). In each individual community the music acquired a sound unique to that specific locale and spoke to regional interests and identities. Scholar Bill Malone (2004) states, "there is no such thing as 'Appalachian music.' There are instead a wide variety of instrumental and vocal styles made by Appalachian musicians, many of which have exerted great influence in the larger realm of American music" (p. 115). These Appalachian musics, often categorized as folk or traditional musics, originated or circulated in the southeastern United States; Here music was deeply rooted in daily life; religion and family held central importance, and storytelling kept people's imaginations alive.

These key aspects of Appalachian culture have relied on various interactions between oral and written traditions. As Pierre Bourdieu (1986) observes, oral knowledge dies with its bearer

unless it is passed on to others (p. 245); similarly, both orality and writing in bluegrass help preserve the tradition. As shape note singing was written down in the early 20th century, so too did bluegrass begin to appear in written forms. Philip Bohlman (1988) states, "it is more likely that the history of a folk song exists sometimes in oral tradition and sometimes in written tradition, usually, however, drawing upon both" (p. 28). Jessica Smith confirms, "I grew up in a family that, most all of my family went to the Church of Christ, which was well known for all *a cappella* singing, meaning like four part harmonies. And I learned shape notes as a kid and I went to singing schools" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). Traditionally written singing forms like shape note singing were the musical foundations for many early and pre-bluegrass performers. Jessica verifies this saying, "it's [learning shape notes] really cool because you hear people like Monroe talk about learning shape notes, and Ralph Stanley when they were kids and they went to singing school. So I think it's kinda cool that I can say I did those things too" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). Jessica's excitement in learning a singing style that Bill Monroe learned shows the cultural capital or worth this form of singing holds within the bluegrass genre.

Shape note singing holds cultural capital in the form of embodied cultural capital An idea developed by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital stands for accumulated labor, comprising either materialized or "incorporated" labor (p. 96). Further, the cultural form of capital accumulate with time; it is "subject to a hereditary transmission" and "cannot be accumulated beyond the appropriating capacities of an individual agent; it declines and dies with its bearer" (p. 99). Shape note singing accordingly has grown as a tradition over

time, lives through oral and interactive transmission, and accumulates through individuals who then teach it to others.

As the voice provided a means for transmitting traditional songs, singing allowed the continuation of traditions like shape note singing. The traditional tunes that bluegrass music has incorporated and retained from its old-time roots also passed this way, from older generations to the young, and have been reinvigorated by such transmissions. Shape note singing served as one of the prevalent forms of singing in the southeast (examples include Sand Mountain area in Northeast Alabama (J. M. Smith, 2009)), and employed a notation of specific shapes, e.g. square, diamond, circle, to indicate pitch and intervallic relationships. Training in such an art occurs commonly and is often-times expected.

The Sacred Harp oral tradition intertwines itself with the written tradition, but oral learning still holds more importance than the written tradition. Kiri Miller (2008) states, “as in all musical traditions, many aspects of performance practice go unnotated. One need not stay long at a Sacred Harp convention to realize that not everyone is singing what's written” (p. 86). Although the written forms of Sacred Harp tradition hold less capital, they do help promote and keep this oral tradition alive. Miller states, “the tunebook has prestige as an artifact of American music history and Southern culture” (p. 86). As with other forms of music, writing in the Sacred Harp tradition serves as part of a diverse learning process.

Based on an aural tradition, Appalachian music existed as a foundation of family life that involved both boys and girls, as well as men and women. Philip Bohlman (1988) states “analysis of a single song stands not just to proffer a hermeneutic explanation of its form or the meaning of

its text, but to illumine its relation to the entire tradition of which it is a part" (p. 17). This statement emphasizes the importance of music within social structures, particularly in family traditions. Currently recordings and notated versions of songs and tunes exist as an attempt to preserve tradition, but do not represent the primary means of bluegrass transmission. These notated versions include music books on learning bluegrass for various instruments and large compilations of fiddle tunes. My conversations with bluegrass musicians indicate that learning the music by ear remains the method most accepted by bluegrass musicians whereas notated devices exist as a less appreciated process.

The oral tradition was an important part of girls' educational lives; this remains the case today. Tammy Rogers, like many children in the United States, began the violin through classical training. In time, her father wanted her to learn the old time fiddle tune tradition. She states:

> After I had been playing oh, three or four months I guess, my dad started showing me my first fiddle tunes…I started pretty quickly trying to pick things out by ear. Like little melodies and stuff so he sent me that summer after fifth grade, up to East Tennessee to stay with my grandmother, and he knew a fellow up there who was an old-time fiddler, and I took lessons from him that summer (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009).

Training in western art music allowed Tammy to gain facility with classical violin; she then moved on to old time fiddling; in Tammy's experience, training in both traditions relied heavily on the oral tradition

Learning old time music by ear exhibits a kind of status or prestige in itself, much like Jessica's experiences with shape note singing. While written music preserves parameters like pitch, rhythm, and text, learning by ear in a one-on-one setting allows the passing of styles, techniques, and sounds unique to each musical community. Robert Cantwell (2003) confirms the multifaceted processes that occur in oral transmissions, saying, "for the ear can do what the eye reading a score cannot--that is, attend to a number of rhythms at once" (p. 94).

In various musical traditions, young girls and older women enjoy more freedom than do women in the middle of their lives. Boys, girls, and older women all take part equally in learning and performing their own musical traditions more frequently than women of middle or child bearing ages (Bowers, 1993). Children learn the music and songs of their heritage from past generations; in turn, they preserve these traditions or practices and pass them on to their children. This process forms a key element of community, uniting everyone with a common interest. Interestingly, boys and girls are taught the same music and songs and allowed to engage in both up until a certain age (Ritchie, 1955, p. 231). But in the rural southern tradition, once girls reach puberty, their acceptance and ability to participate in certain activities comes to an end.

Coming of age for young girls displays an important turning point in their lives in various cultures, including Appalachian culture. Jane Bowers (1993) briefly discusses young girls' graduation to adulthood in the Druze culture of Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Through ceremony, older women initiate girls into adulthood who have reached puberty, with song and storytelling. Bower's states, "For us [American society], no celebration marks the attainment of puberty; no

particular restrictions are imposed on menstruating women; and marriage need not be legitimized by the elaborate exchange of property" (p. 15).

Although Appalachia does not partake in extravagant moments of formal ceremony for coming of age, girls do experience changes in lifestyle once they reach puberty. Musically, girls at young ages partake in music making equally with the boys and men in their family. But once old enough to take on more adult responsibilities and identity, in particular once they reach the age of child bearing, they experience new restrictions and limitations in their musical involvement.

In the Appalachian region, music and rural life have coexisted since the first European immigrants arrived in the area. Ballads brought over from Europe provided most musical entertainment for families (Ritchie, 1955, p. 76). These sung stories provide numerous examples of how society functioned.

Due to gender roles dictated by Appalachian society, murder ballads portray women as deceitful and sinful and often justify the men's slaying of these women. Kenneth Tunnell (1991) discusses the stereotypical gender roles in these murder ballads. The ballads reveal a social climate that presents these murderers' actions as socially acceptable because the women victims are characterized as dishonorable. These gender roles perpetuate unfavorable stereotypes about women as unfaithful or unstable, reinforcing issues that women repeatedly encounter in a male arena.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Deborah J. Thompson (2006) argues that the roles men and women hold today result from Appalachia's strong observance of local traditions. As discussed

earlier, women characters within murder ballads display only two key roles, either the peaceful homemaker or the unpredictable harlot, somewhat parallel to the classic duality between the virgin or the whore. This duality appears most prevalently in murder ballads, but also has resonance with real life and women's images. Along such lines, Jane Bernstein (2004) discusses how musicians like Joan Baez have taken on the role of virgin mother in an anti-sexual persona (p. 167). Women like Baez exhibit qualities that oppose the "whore" figure in holding a less bodily and sexual persona, forcing the audience to focus on their music rather than their looks. Critics named Baez "the virgins of sorrows" as her music often held melancholic and poignant meanings (p. 180).

Women exist as both the victim and the murderer in some ballads. The ballad "Young Hunting" also known as "Loving Henry" (Child Ballad # 68) exemplifies the punishments women can endure if they stray from their given role and take matters into their own hands. Scholar David Atkinson (1999) details the idea of the "magical corpse" and how in old murder ballads the corpse often reveals its murder by various means (p. 8). The guilt that the murderer feels often proves a torturous punishment. The corpses in many of these murder ballads begin to freshly bleed when the murderer approaches the body. In "Young Hunting" the woman kills her lover and in one version, after the corpse bleeds in her presence, she is burned alive after trying to place the blame on her maid. Such a ballad taught young children obedience and knowing their proper place within society. If they strayed from or challenged these roles they could meet an untimely death.

Often songs presented women as perpetuating their own misfortunes. The most common theme revolves around a woman's unexpected pregnancy and the man ridding himself of the burden by killing the woman (Tunnell, 1991, p. 102). On the other hand, many of the ballads offer no reason for killing the woman; rather, the man apparently kills her out of pure hatred. This hatred extends from the historical stereotype that women display untrustworthy and secretive attitudes towards men, either by denying men what they want or by cheating. Susan C. Cook (1994) supports this notion saying, "all [ballads] contain some aspect of the judgment against womankind and thus maintain the misogynistic intent of the ballad's story" (p. 207). The gender roles given to women by society perpetuate the negative stereotypes of the ballads. Tunnell states:

> This frontier mentality [an independent attitude associated with men] and dominance over women are exemplified among themes found in southern literature and bluegrass music--music that is nearly entirely dominated by men....Such themes have the latent effect, at least, of terrorizing women, further subjugating them, making them more dependent on males, threatening them by suggesting that murder is a viable alternative in inter-personal relationships and propagating the independence of the Appalachian male (p. 109).

Women infrequently demonstrate an ability to break away from men's threatening and dominant attitudes in such songs. As Barbara Smith (1999) states, "it is not surprising then the only antebellum women able to command much attention, apparently either then or now, tend to have committed heinous criminal acts, extreme gender transgressions, or both" (p. 6). Further, the

presentation of women as weaker individuals connects directly to Deborah Thompson's ideas regarding women's real-life roles in Appalachia.

The unacceptable behavior of women in Appalachian ballads displays the virgin-versus-whore dichotomy present in other genres of music as well. Cook (1994) explains this issue in American balladry by comparing ballads to *Samson et Dalila* by Saint-Saëns, saying that women in ballads act out their desires and therefore destroy male heroes in the process (p. 209). In most ballads, Cook discerns, "narratives yet again replicate that timeworn duality of women as the passive 'angel of the house' or the active 'angel of death': the virgin or the whore" (p. 216). And in Appalachian and country musics as well, men prefer for women to maintain an active persona until marriage, and then adopt the demeanor of the passive angel afterwards; otherwise the woman undergoes unfavorable scrutiny.

The roles of the male characters in these ballads also exemplify American society's patriarchal foundation. Murder ballads generally did not assign fault to the man for impregnating an unmarried woman. Only rarely was the man found guilty of murder, for which he received the punishment of prison or death.

Society's assumed negative roles for women in ballads perpetuates their positions within culture. This attention brings to light a contradiction noted by George Lewis (1993), that of the woman as "honky tonk angel" or as the "momma" in country music. Lewis states, "the woman is, before marriage, supposed to be free and sexual enough to attract a man but, at the same time, be socially responsible enough that she, like momma before her, can be considered a legitimate

candidate for marriage" (p. 235). This tension surfaces throughout Appalachia's history, as well as in other cultures.

In the case of premarital pregnancy, society solely placed blame on the woman. But it was socially acceptable for the man to have intimate relations without being married. In the Scottish ballad "Jellon Graeme" (Child Ballad, no. 90) the man kills his lover and the baby she is carrying:

> Out and sprang young Jellon Graeme from out of the woods nearby
> Get down, get down, you Rosy Flower, it's here that you will die
> She jumped down from off her horse, then down upon her knee
> Pity on me, dear Jellon Graeme, I'm not prepared to die
>
> Wait until our babe is born and then you can let me lie
> If I should spare your life, he said, until our babe is born
> I know your pa and all your kin would hang me in the morn
> (Shuldham-Shaw & Lyle, 1983, p. 198)

After he kills his lover, Jellon Graeme feels pity for his child and rips that child out of the mothers womb:

> He's torn the baby out of the womb, washed him in water and blood
> Named him after a robber man, he called him Robin Hood
> (Shuldham-Shaw & Lyle, 1983, p.198)

The woman is this ballad meets a tragic fate for a fault not entirely her own. As he is the father of her son, the man is equally at fault for impregnating the woman. Yet, the woman takes on the role of whore as the text condemns her for being sexually independent before marriage.

In a contemporary example of a murder ballad called "Caleb Meyer" by Gillian Welch, the gender roles are reversed:

> He threw me in the needle bed,
> across my dress he lay
> then he pinned my hands above my head
> and I commenced to pray.
>
> I cried My God, I am your child
> send your angels down
> Then feelin' with my fingertips,
> the bottle neck I found.
>
> I drew that glass across his neck
> as fine as any blade,
> and I felt his blood pour fast and hot
> around me where I laid (Welch, 1998).

This murder ballad starts like many others, but the woman quickly holds her ground and defends herself against Caleb Meyer. In more recent examples, women have to opportunity to speak out against their mistreatment, unlike the characters found in early European ballads.

Women's negative roles are also represented in the instruments chosen to symbolize the woman's character in these murder ballads. Hamessley (2005) explains that in various version of the murder ballad "Pretty Polly" the fiddle is chosen to represent the voice of Polly. The connotations for the woman remain negative as the fiddle itself has historically negative associations in Appalachian music. Hamlessley states that the fiddle has long been associated with the devil and with women who have died. In "Pretty Polly," the fiddle serves as a way for Polly to reveal who killed her through the music (p. 26).

Religion and Gender

The importance of religion in the southeastern United States strongly intersected with daily life. Women historically held minimal roles in the church and these religious communities often imposed segregated seating. Although they held very limited roles, women did participate in communal singing at religious functions. As shape note singing holds great cultural importance in this region, women do participate frequently in such singing sessions, although they do not lead singing sessions as much as men do. J. M. Smith (2009) states "on Sand Mountain, the 'keyers' are usually male although some women will occasionally key their own songs" (p. 35). Gender bias has not prevailed as heavily in Sacred Harp singing as in other forms of religious worship, however. Shape note singing within Sacred Harp communities has provided a musical outlet for women in Appalachia, both in the past and more so currently (J. M. Smith, 2009).

In a contrasting case study, Shaunna Scott (1994) discusses the history of a Pentecostal community, its gender and social divisions, and the changes that occurred as outside lifestyles descended upon the Appalachian region. As Scott states, in this study of a small Pentecostal community in Small Branch, Kentucky, women of this church gradually left their congregation because of their unequal treatment.

Women in the Primitive Baptist church too have substantially limited roles, as Beverly Bush Patterson (1995) discusses. In one of her interviews, a deacon's wife said, "women did not have a 'role' in the church and 'that's all there is to that!'" (p. 61). The dominance of men and patriarchal ideals in the Primitive Baptist church manifests in the ways men continually view

women within the culture. Patterson explains, "men recognized that women in their churches had abilities but the preacher nevertheless maintained that ability in itself did not qualify women to be leaders of men" (p. 62). Further, Patterson illustrates how the church required women to remain silent and that "occasionally, preachers publicly commend[ed] women on their silence in church" (p. 63). The church required women to ask their husbands to speak for them as their own voiced opinions went unacknowledged (p. 63). Interestingly, these women accepted the patriarchal traditions of the church and their required silence. These conventions, to some, may appear anti-feminist and anti-progressive, but in a region where tradition exists as the foundation of culture, this Primitive Baptist community respects the church's patriarchal rules.

In the Primitive Baptist church, the shape note tradition allowed women to obtain communal roles rather than individual roles (an idea I discuss further in Chapter 3). On the other hand, Scott (1994) shows in the Small Branch community women rarely if ever acquire individual opportunities to express themselves. Scott makes an important note that in Pentecostalism, patriarchal control is emphasized as it "depicts women as 'weaker vessels' and command[s] them to remain 'under submission' to men" (p. 229). These depictions identify women as always dependent, and therefore confined to the communal arena. The image of women as weak and fragile is present in all aspects of Pentecostalism and places women "at the bottom of a divinely sanctioned hierarchy headed by a male God and his son" (p. 231). Even on the few occasions when women at Small Branch are allowed to preach or lead a song, they remain unable to express their individuality. As Scott asserts, "when women do preach, they

frequently find that their spiritual gifts are devalued and their pastoral authority is undermined" (p. 229).

While singing was very common in these southern churches, instrumental music was not. In fact, many denominations forbid the use of instruments at services altogether. Thompson (2006) asserts that the "religious strictures against instrumental music and dancing throughout much of Appalachia weigh[ed] more heavily on women than men" (p. 74). Accordingly, Patterson (1995) shows the prevalence of females in the role of vocalist. She states, "women participated in the singing, but otherwise they remain[ed] deliberately silent during church meetings (p. 62).

These traditional and gendered perceptions of women faded as more industrialized ways of living seeped into the Appalachian region. Many women left their traditional roles to find jobs and became more involved with people outside their communities. As one of the many possible reasons for the women of Small Branch to have left the community, Scott (1994) offers, "the social and personal costs of sexual promiscuity and rebellion" attributed to the female gender (p. 232). After participating in a tradition of church teachings that labeled women as rebellious, these women finally stepped away from the church and embraced their individuality. For women to venture off and take control of their own lives defied traditional, religious teachings.

Around the 1980s, these women eagerly started living according to their own rules, taking on new roles in a society outside their small, religiously bound communities. Having come from a religious community where they existed strictly as a weak and oppressed group, these women entered a work force for the first time where they took part in a different kind of

community. In many respects, both in their jobs and in society as a whole, these women began a new lives as unique individuals. They found it easy to fit into modern society; from not being allowed to wear make-up, blue jeans, shorts or short skirts, these women could now dress as they please, wear make-up and earn a living (Scott, 1994, p. 239). These "new" women bring back George Lewis' (1989) idea of social sex-role changes. In the case of Small Branch Pentecostal, these women challenged "local patriarchal authority" and thus their "behavior upset the traditional gender ideology, which associated masculinity with independence, strength, assertiveness, and rationality, and linked femininity with dependence, weakness, passivity, and emotionalism" (p. 239).

Women Musicians in Appalachia

Women's roles and experiences inside a gender segregated church and home carried over to their roles within the music industry. Women did play instruments to accompany their singing at home, but less frequently than men did. Thompson (2006) suggests, "instrumental music has been most closely associated with males, culture, public space and the mind, while vocal music is related to females, nature, private and the body" (p. 73).

Even more rarely did women play instruments outside the home; people commonly assumed that women did not possess the necessary need to do so. Historically, women experienced scorn and ridicule for stepping outside their given societal roles, and an assumed lack of talent kept them in their musically prescribed places for the most part. Bill Malone (2002) discusses women's musical contributions to bluegrass music by stating, "women certainly played banjos, fiddles, and other instruments at home...but few men were eager to compete against

ladies in any kind of public arena, and the women were encouraged to keep their talents noncompetitive and at home" (p. 22). Set in their ways, men disapproved of women holding and bettering their instrumental talents. Tammy comments on this topic, saying:

> The thing that I used to hate the most, more than anything, when I was growing up was, you know these old guys would come up, and in their mind they were complimenting me, and their compliment was, 'wow, you're really good for a girl.' And argh, it would just send me through the roof! (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009).

The patriarchal gender biases present in society continue in bluegrass even today, as Tammy points out.

Even though women did play instruments like the banjo and the fiddle, Appalachian society often regarded the dulcimer, a very quiet stringed instrument, as better suited for a woman's voice as well as the quiet and reserved personality a woman was supposed to maintain. Lujza Tari (1999) discusses how women historically performed with the dulcimer and similar instruments. Specifically, the dulcimer is "deemed to be female, [and] this instrument (*psalterion* or dulcimer) seems to have survived in the Middle Ages, as depictions and written accounts mainly show women as players" (p. 106). Malone (2002) ascribes to the dulcimer similarly demure or feminized qualities; he states, "the dulcimer beautifully complemented the singing of lonesome ballads and love songs" (p. 25).

Although generally restricted to practicing music at home, a few women in the early-20th-century United States found their way into the spotlight. Two women widely recognized were Sara and Maybelle Carter of the Carter family, a prominent music group who

began performing in the late 1920s. The group consisted of A.P. Carter (1891-1960), his wife Sara Carter (1898-1979), and his sister-in-law Maybelle Carter (1909-1978). Even in the male dominated musical world at this time, Sara and Maybelle Carter greatly influenced early country music. Sara already had musical experience before the Carter Family began. As a teenager she had "formed a girl group with her cousin Madge Addington" (Zwonitzer and Hirshberg, 2002, p. 40). Malone asserts of the women of the Carter Family, "Sara always led the singing with her clear, strong soprano voice; and Maybelle countered with a gentler alto harmony" (p. 66). A. P. Carter did very little singing, so overall this group created one of country's first female singing duos.

As the most quiet and shy of the group, Sara stood out the most in the group (Oermann and Bufwack, 2004, p. 49). The fact that Sara performed much of the lead vocals shows that she could assume a primary role and hold her own in a male dominated arena, despite her reserved personality. Sara had set her goals and found ways to obtain them. For this reason, and very unusually, she divorced A.P. Carter in 1939. Bufwack states, "These steps were so extreme, so bold, and so rarely taken by women of her time and place that it is virtually impossible for us to grasp their enormity" (p. 49). The Carters' song "Single Girl/Married Girl" (1939) exemplified the struggles married women endured; the song placed the single girl in a role of great freedom while the married woman suffered, trapped and confined. Sara Carter, in her bold move to find happiness in life changed the Carter Family group dynamic. Although she and A.P. divorced, she continued to cultivate a "family" feel and performed with the group frequently.

In the early 1960s, an old-time music duo, Hazel Dickens (1935-2011) and Alice Gerrard (b. 1934) also opened many doors for female musicians. Growing up, Hazel Dickens had learned old-time music traditions from her family. With difficulty and hard work, and using her unique talents, Hazel found success for herself and opened doors for female folk musicians in the southeast. Especially, Hazel sang "tenor" and imitated the Bill Monroe sound. Bill Malone (2008) illustrates Hazel and Alice's importance saying:

> She [Hazel Dickens] joined with Alice Gerrard to break new ground for women in the field of bluegrass, a domain that had been notorious for its dominance by 'good old boys'. Hazel and Alice truly were 'pioneering women', with passionate duets and searing songs that inspired women to invade this masculine province (p. 1).

Hazel's hard earned success in a society where women dealt with unequal treatment and where men discouraged women "from expressing themselves;" she demonstrated that with diligence and confidence women could make a name for themselves in the music business (p. 6). Hazel's singing of "Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There" expressed women's constant struggle with gender differences. For this reason, her music has been actively "sought after by women's organizations, miners' advocates, hard core bluegrass fans, and the intellectual-ferment crowd" (Thomason, 1982, p. 23).

Through her many excursions and musical performances around the country, Hazel constantly encountered masculine authority. Many music venues were not considered respectable places for women. Old-time and bluegrass music were found mostly in bars and other small venues. Dickens stated, "It was pretty disillusioning. The men were playing roles the way they

were taught. There was a lot of cheating (on wives and girlfriends) and they would probably have rather had a looser person (in the band than I)" (Thomason, 1982, p. 24). Bill Malone (2008) comments on this: "Hazel keenly observed the ways women were treated. If women came to the bars, men treated them as if they were prostitutes, talking about them behind their backs while trying to exploit them sexually" (p. 11). Difficulty arose for Hazel in dealing with such sexist mindsets. But as a powerful and determined woman, Hazel made her way, showing the strength women hold and how they proactively and creatively match men's talent in the music business.

In entering the music business over the course of the twentieth century, female musicians like Sara and Hazel caused a change in traditional gender roles. In the 1970s a more pronounced gender roles reversal occurred, as George Lewis (1993) illustrates in his discussion of country music. In convergence with second wave feminism, these sex role shifts began when women stepped out of the home environment and started working to support their families; men were forced to stay home and take care of the children and the house. Rory Dicker (2003) discusses how women forcibly gained power during this time. He emphasizes the frequency with which role reversals took place, allowing women to attain more power than they had previously. Women's songs took on stories from a female perspective, as opposed to the male perspective, especially in country music.

Women in the country music industry started taking a hold of their own musical careers and breaking into the country music scene full force. Female singers in the 1970s, with the lyrics and stories they expressed, represented direct thoughts of women about women. Loretta Lynn's song "The Pill" (1974) expresses a women's frustration with her life and fulfilling the role of

mother, along with her desire to see the world. She decides to take contraception as a means of asserting control over her own life, freeing herself from the typical motherhood role. Unlike traditional songs from male perspectives, these songs gave rise to a proposed sex-role reversal. This role reversal illustrates a watershed moment for women in the music industry, when women took action against the lack of recognition they received for their contributions, talent, and hard work. Lewis (1993) discusses Dolly Parton's hit song "9 to 5" in similar terms, with lyrics that state, "They let you dream just to watch them shatter; You're just a step on the boss man's ladder," demonstrate women's fruitless, but increasingly visible struggle against the male dominated industry (p. 232).

With women's new roles, the stories and lyrics behind men's song changed as well, holding more sentimental and sad meanings. The men in these country songs always find themselves in a sorry state. These men struggle because they cannot make decisions and they always feel secluded, and in some cases they are then forced to take on women's previous jobs as primary caregivers (Lewis, 1993, p. 236). As a result, Lewis states, "in this way, the man emerges as a suffering figure, to be pitied and respected, while the new woman is seen as a one-dimensional bitch" (p. 236). Interestingly, even though these women begin to make names for themselves and live off their own successes, society continually sees them in a negative light.

Authenticity

Women's roles and performances in country and bluegrass music bring forward issues of authenticity within these genres. Traditionally, the male creation of bluegrass music has accepted the inclusion of four to seven male musicians playing acoustic instruments as the authentic

bluegrass band (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 78). Jessica conveyed shock after hearing this definition. Although Goldsmith's version of this definition dates from 1965, many people, perhaps surprisingly, still find this definition an accurate portrayal of bluegrass bands. When asked how she would define an authentic bluegrass band, Jessica stated that "an authentic bluegrass band is definitely made up of all acoustic instruments" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009); further it uses an upright bass as opposed to electric bass (which occasionally exists in the genre). She did not specify whether or not a bluegrass band must incorporate all male members and instead focused strictly on the instrumental makeup of the band.

With regard to the voice, authenticity presents another problem for women in bluegrass music. As mentioned in Chapter 1, women, although prevalent in bluegrass, often have received criticism for their inability to replicate the "high lonesome" sound created by Bill Monroe. For audiences who fell in love with the traditional sounds of the first bluegrass performers, women's inability to embrace the new sounds of bluegrass problematizes their inclusion in the genre.

With gendered stereotypes and issues of authenticity continually present in bluegrass music, female musicians struggle to redefine their roles within the genre. Because of the persistence of traditional ideals, women find it hard to receive significant recognition in bluegrass, particularly when they venture beyond the roles of vocalists or back up musicians. In the following chapter, I discuss women's current roles in bluegrass music through the experiences of my three informants and within the context of existing scholarship.

CHAPTER III
"SHE'S JUST SINGIN": THIS ISN'T BLUEGRASS

"There's a lot of women that just sing and don't play. And that kinda bugs me a little bit too. I'd rather see someone with an instrument in their hand than just singing. Cause to me that's country music. You know, country music is when they stand there and don't play. The music and the instruments are such a big part of bluegrass" (Linda Bobbitt, personal communication, Aug. 22, 2010).

As a woman striving for instrumental virtuosity, Linda Bobbitt of the Backporch Bluegrass band points out that women most often appear as vocalists in bluegrass. With this statement, Linda, as a woman playing in a masculinized genre, confirms masculine notions of virtuosic instrumental skills as a necessity in bluegrass music, and perceives these abilities as gendered. Thinking about vocal roles, Jessica Smith also confirms masculine notions of bluegrass music, saying that sounding as close to Bill Monroe as possible is a necessity for all bluegrass singers, regardless of their gender (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). As a patriarchally driven genre, bluegrass perpetuates women's predominant roles as vocalists, as women's historical association with the voice allows bluegrass women musicians to attain lead roles as singers more easily than as instrumentalists. Yet, as Linda's comment reveals, women's singing in bluegrass is often devalued as a popular or country phenomenon.

As both vocalists and instrumentalists, moreover, women bluegrass musicians face challenging performance contexts. Thomas Turino (2008) distinguishes between participatory (or social) music, which operates according to a communal dynamic, and presentational music, which situates the individual performer as the focus of the performance experience, and as quite

separate from the audience. For Turino, communal ideals center on the idea that all performers together enjoy a sense of unity; he states, “I think that what happens during a good performance is that the multiple differences among us are forgotten and we are fully focused on an activity that emphasizes our ‘sameness’” (p. 18). Although during bluegrass performances the musicians seem like they work as one, bluegrass’ aesthetic continues to emphasize musical virtuosity, and hence individuality, as each individual instrument takes a break during a given song. Further, emphasis on the traditional masculinization of virtuosity creates gender bias within the genre.

With regard to Thomas Turino’s (2008) concept of communal and individual participation (as discussed Chapter 1), women bluegrass musicians appear only partially in both realms, whereas men appear fully in both. In bluegrass, women experience some sense of community as they are musically and socially accepted as vocalists. However, they achieve less individual presence or status, particularly as soloists on melody instruments, than do their male counterparts, who are well established both in communal and individual, and vocal and instrumental roles.

The ways in which women participate in bluegrass, as vocalists and instrumentalists, encompass a complex intertwining of both of Turino’s modes of performance--the individual and the communal. For example, in relaxed and informal performance settings, often the communal dynamic prevails. As Michelle Kisliuk (1988) discusses, when bluegrass musicians perform at jam sessions, as long as they know the proper jam session etiquette, all ages and genders are welcomed as participant performers. In this setting, audience and performer participation exists more easily because of the casual and social atmosphere. On the other hand, in more professional

settings, like formal concerts and professional gigs, a greater need arises to showcase individual virtuosity and to thus conform to audience expectations. Further, rules of tradition dictate less interaction between performer and audience. And in more formal settings, older audiences continue to prefer male bands as authentically bluegrass.

Part of the challenge women bluegrass musicians face stems from masculine associations of the music. Simon Frith (1990) discusses the masculine attributes of rock music, emphasizing its strong tendency toward masculinity and how women still face obstacles to participating in the genre. He particularly discusses heavily gendered notions of rock music, including "cock rock," a term that in itself excludes women. Frith states, "musically, such rock takes off from the sexual frankness of rhythm and blues but adds a cruder male physicality (hardness, control, virtuosity)" (p. 44). These three words, hardness, control and virtuosity, easily correlate with qualities that bluegrass music portrays. Bluegrass emphasizes hard driving rhythms, individual technical virtuosity and control of the instrument. Thus, similarly male attributes are implicit in bluegrass. Frith further illuminates the reasons behind women's musical exclusion:

> It is boys who experience rock as a collective culture, a shared male world of fellow fans and fellow musicians. The problems facing a woman seeking to enter the rock world as a participant are clear. A girl is supposed to be an individual listener, she is not encouraged to develop the skills and knowledge to become a performer (p. 46).

This helps demonstrate Turino's (2008) communal-versus-individual idea in that women exist as isolated individuals within a masculine community that excludes them. Notions that women lack

talent or should refrain from active participation persist in bluegrass, even while some women prevail.

This said, bluegrass music offers three main roles to women, all falling into either of Turino's communal or individual categories and sometimes straddling both. These roles are vocalist, backup instrumentalist, and occasionally lead instrumentalist. In what Turino (2008) calls individual and performative settings--as opposed to communal and participatory settings--, difficulty arises for women attempting to earn acceptance as lead instrumentalists. As this chapter will demonstrate, separated from the realm of virtuosic skill, women lack the authenticity required to participate fully in the bluegrass style. Ultimately, women thus find it difficult to obtain communal and or individual acceptance as musicians. To explain the above points I discuss each of my informant's personal thoughts by examining their roles in the bluegrass genre. I also draw upon the scholarship of musicologists Kisliuk (1988), Keith Negus (1992, 1996), and Robert Walser (1993), as well as law professor, Mark Fenster (1993, 1998), who has extensively studied media and the music industry.

Within the bluegrass ensemble, melody instruments--fiddle, mandolin, or banjo--hold the greatest prestige, followed by the backup or rhythm instruments and the voice. In bluegrass the melody and/or virtuosic instruments carry more social and cultural capital because of bluegrass' emphasis on soloistic abilities, a male associated activity. In seeking full acceptance in the individual realm, certain women bluegrass musicians have demonstrated virtuosic talent on lead instruments. By achieving greater individual visibility and technical ability, such women have

also gained increased appreciation in the communal realm of bluegrass culture. Among my informants, Tammy Rogers well exemplifies this position through her virtuosic fiddling ability.

Holding virtuosic talent in bluegrass legitimizes a performer's musicality. Like those of jazz, bluegrass structures rely on each instrument playing virtuosic solos within each song. Walser (1993) explains similar virtuosic ideals as they pertain to heavy metal music. As bluegrass uses virtuosity to legitimize a performer's quality and worth, heavy metal musicians also place great importance on soloistic musicianship. Walser discusses how heavy metal music appropriated virtuosic ideals from classical music (p. 58). He states, "their [heavy metal musicians] instrumental virtuosity, theoretical self-consciousness, and studious devotion to the works of the classical canon means that their work could be valorized in the more 'legitimate' terms of classical excellence" (p. 59). Walser's example demonstrates that musical virtuosity is necessary for social legitimacy. Bluegrass likewise, values musical virtuosity.

One the other hand, women in bluegrass play bass–the least virtuosic of bluegrass instruments–more commonly than they do other instruments. Women who play the bass find partial acceptance in the individual realm as playing the bass requires great skill and earns respect among bluegrass musicians who value instrumental technique. Even so, playing the bass places the performer in the rear of the ensemble, and in a non-melodic musical role; thus, women bassists still occupy background roles.

Women find it easier to obtain backup roles as they experience less pressure in these positions (Gay, 1998). Although these positions require other forms of responsibility and musicianship, the virtuosic aspect is absent. Both Jessica Smith and Linda Bobbitt fulfill the

position of the bass player, which requires steady rhythmic skills and attentive listening to keep the band together. Even though women fulfill such important roles, bluegrass more highly values virtuosity.

Contrary to bluegrass conventions, few women choose to specialize in virtuosic instrumental talent and instead focus on their vocal abilities as they have more access to positions as vocalists. In Chapter 2, I discussed women as the carriers of tradition in bluegrass culture, a function that has historically placed women in the role of vocalist. Gendered social norms in bluegrass music contribute to the negative connotations that women experience when attempting to break out of their expected musical roles by taking up an instrument. The list of female musicians in bluegrass music includes few strictly virtuosic instrumentalists, but many vocalists. Examples of the latter include Alison Krauss, Rhonda Vincent, and Claire Lynch, who all sing more than they play.

As women strive for equal acceptance within bluegrass, it might appear that their demonstration of virtuosic talents would legitimize their musicianship and yield gender equality. But even as feminism tries to create equality between the genders, it simultaneously continues to exaggerate the difference between men and women. As discussed in Chapter 1, Judith Butler (1999) suggests that women perpetuate negative connotations about themselves. To reiterate, she states, “feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion” (p. viii). Linda Bobbitt’s above statement shows a similar principle at work in bluegrass music, as she prefers that women play an instrument virtuosically and not rely their vocal talents. This equates female vocalizing to stereotypes

concurrent in country music. Linda's ideas about how bluegrass distinguishes itself from country music shows that women might sustain the masculine ideals of bluegrass music just as frequently as men.

Although bluegrass proves a genre based on individualistic and virtuosic ideals, professional bluegrass culture's unequal treatment of women musicians can contradict Turino's (2008) concept of music as a social activity that creates a communal feeling for musicians (p. 18). The perceived relative importance of communal and individual ideals in bluegrass varies among participants, and depends on age and the generational position of those performing and listening to the music. Younger bluegrass musicians, like those in the Spring Creek Bluegrass band and groups I've performed with or observed, appear to accept female musicians more easily than do older generations. These younger musicians seem to decide who performs with them based on talent and musicianship rather than whether someone is a man or a woman. For example, in mentioning that I performed in groups with mixed genders, Tammy states, "Oh you guys are babies. So you've grown up with seeing mixed bands a lot. I think that helps change...the more people see that, the more comfortable they get" (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009). In such situations, the communal/participatory and individual/ presentational modes merge to create a more equitable experience for female musicians.

Women as Vocalists:

As discussed in Chapter 2, western popular music forms have placed women in the role of vocalist, both in bluegrass and other genres. Regarding popular music and gender, Frith (2007) states, "Women musicians who make it are almost always singers" (p. 319). Due to women's

association with the voice, problems arise for them in genres like rock and bluegrass, where other musicians, especially male musicians, hold strong beliefs regarding such gender associations. In rock and bluegrass music, the ability to play an instrument well is key to one's acceptance within the genre. Various scholars including Mavis Bayton (1998), Simon Frith (2007) and Bill Malone (2002 & 2008) have confirmed this notion. Leslie Gay (1998) states of indie rock bands, "Singers who are not also instrumentalists have limited authority in the creation of a band's music, often restricted to the role of spectator" (p. 84). Bluegrass has historically held similar values.

Bluegrass also parallels heavy metal, which Robert Walser (1993) describes as a patriarchal genre that represents "male power and female subordination" and women as a threat within the genre (p. xvi). In performing the role of vocalists, women gain access to masculine styles as men find them less threatening. Likewise, in bluegrass, women vocalists historically kept the ballad tradition alive by participating in oral transmission and singing practices. However, the female characters within the ballads held negative roles and were looked down upon by men. Thus, even though women hold importance as vocalists in the Appalachian ballad tradition, the content of the ballads demeans women.

As discussed above, Linda contends that society places women in the role of vocalists more often than not. Linda states, "You know there's--none come to mind right now--but there's a lot of women that just sing and don't play" (Bobbitt, personal communication, Aug. 22, 2010). True to this statement, many bluegrass women generally do not play instruments or play them minimally during performances. Some female musicians possess virtuosic talents, but they rarely

display them and instead lean more on their vocal talents. In her new album, *Taken* (2010), Rhonda Vincent provides strictly vocal tunes and no instrumental tracks, confirming her focus on her singing. The tunes on this album, although representing bluegrass vocal virtuosity, do not exemplify the high lonesome sound created by Bill Monroe. Rhonda's voice holds a more country music vocal sound and without a truly bluegrass instrumental background, her music does not hold bluegrass classification according to traditionally minded listeners.

Some women bluegrass musicians deliberately focus more on their vocals. As a result, their musical efforts are often interpreted in terms of a country music sound, where vocals dominate the genre. Videos by Rhonda Vincent show her ability for virtuosic expertise, yet she chooses to focus on her vocal talents. Within her albums, she does not display these accomplished instrumental talents. A youtube video entitled "Rhonda Vincent-On Mandolin" shows Vincent in her early years focusing strictly on the mandolin and not on vocals (Vincent, 2008). A more recent video shows Vincent promoting a new pick for guitar and mandolin for the Blue Chip Pick Company, displaying her talent on the instrument (Vincent, 2008). However, Vincent much more readily performs as a vocalist than an instrumentalist.

Similarly, Jessica Smith of the Spring Creek Bluegrass band finds that many audience members identify women in only one of two roles--either as the vocalist or as a groupie. Jessica explained how audience members mistake her for a groupie or a fan selling merchandise for the band. Jessica further states, "Then sometimes they'll be like, oh are you the singer, because they assume that, you know, a girl wouldn't necessarily play an instrument, it's usually she's the singer or whatever" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). As stated in Chapter 1,

despite women's advancements toward gender equality, by designating women as groupies or vocalists, popular music culture continues to place women in secondary roles.

Opposite to Linda and Jessica's comments, Tammy exemplifies a woman in roles of both vocalist and instrumentalist. When asked what roles she fulfills in her band, Tammy asserts that in the Steeldrivers she feels comfortable with both instrumental and vocal performance, saying: "Oh I think [I actively participate] in both instrumental and vocally. Cause I sing at least with the Steeldrivers; I sing all the harmonies. So, I'd say they [her musical activities with the Steeldrivers] are pretty equally divided, between singing and playing" (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009). In addition to her vocal role, Tammy fulfills the fiddler positions with the band, indicating that her bluegrass peers accept her as an instrumentalist. Indeed, the virtuosic skills that Tammy exhibits equally match that of any male fiddle player, as heard in their song "Hear the Willow Cry" in their self titled album (2008). She exhibits strong melodic and chordal technique; her skill includes complex licks and double stops. Tammy's acceptance as a musician may also arise from playing in a band of younger generation musicians, and one therefore less influenced by traditionally minded bluegrass musicians.

Tammy's role within her band demonstrates Turino's concept of communal and individual interaction as she fulfills both vocal and instrumental roles (Appendix, see Figures 1.1 and 2.1). In Tammy's atypical case, her virtuosic talent earns her greater acceptance than those women who exhibit strictly vocal or backup instrumental positions. Even though society accepts women communally as vocalists, the industry as a whole neglects to accept them fully. Women

still broadly lack individual prominence, particularly in the form of displaying the instrumental talents required for bluegrass.

Women as Instrumentalists:

Each bluegrass instrument carries a certain amount of what Bourdieu (1986) calls embodied cultural capital (p. 101), as discussed in Chapter 2. To reiterate, each instrument holds a certain amount of symbolic meaning and relative importance in bluegrass music. As a male dominated genre, bluegrass imbues all bluegrass instruments with cultural capital and importance, especially in the eyes of the male musicians involved.

The instrument that carries the most capital is the mandolin as it was Bill Monroe's main instrument and gives bluegrass its unique sound. Its backbeat chops distinguish it from other American folk music styles. Cantwell (2003) states that Bill Monroe "redefined the role of the instrument, liberating it somewhat from the musical line and giving it a sort of proprietary role, darting in and out of the music" (p. 51). Second to the mandolin come the guitar and the banjo. The latter is particularly distinguished in bluegrass by the style of banjo playing. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Scruggs, three-fingered style of banjo playing holds great amounts of capital in bluegrass music (Conway, 1995, p. 199) Both these instruments are key and "essential to the style" (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 80). After the banjo and mandolin, the fiddle, bass, and guitar hold about the same capital as one another in the hierarchy of instruments. Lastly the dobro, or steel guitar, carries the least capital and is sometimes looked down upon within the genre. In part, its lack of status stems from its recent inclusion in bluegrass ensembles, a fact that further demonstrates bluegrass' concern with tradition. Goldsmith (2004) states that this instrument "is

denied true bluegrass status by some (who use the Blue Grass Boys as the criterion of judgment), but it has been employed more and more widely since its addition" (p. 79). Bluegrass places great importance on the ability to play melodic instrumental breaks virtuosically on all of these instruments except the bass, which serves more of a backup role.

When women do play an instrument they do so infrequently and often onlookers such as fans or traditionally minded musicians perceive these instruments as a prop. Linda states that it bothers her to see musicians focusing on their vocals and not their instrumental virtuosity. She explains this saying, "I'd rather see someone with an instrument in their hand than just singing...the music and the instruments are such a big part of bluegrass" (Bobbitt, personal communication, Aug. 22, 2010). Women like Jessica, who attempt to recreate the "bluegrass sound" of Bill Monroe, find they often critique fellow women musicians just as men do. Jessica explained how she often, unconsciously, sees women instrumentalists as gimmicks or novelty acts. She states, "honestly, even in my own head sometimes, which is horrible to say, I'll think, oh cool, yeah you know, girl banjo player. Until I hear her prove herself, you know what I mean?" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct, 6, 2009). The ability to prove oneself virtuosically prevails in bluegrass no matter the gender, but standards appear higher for women. Linda confirms this, stating that older male bluegrass musicians generally do not allow women to perform with them. She states, "I had to really prove myself, that I could play. You know, prove to them that I could play, before I was readily accepted. So I guess there are still stereotypes" (Bobbitt, personal communication, Aug. 22, 2010).

Those women who do in fact possess acknowledged virtuosic ability on a primarily melodic instrument and who are accepted for their skill, have made great strides toward fulfilling a role generally deemed masculine. Such individualistic self definition and success in a typically masculine role represents a step towards legitimizing the virtuosic abilities of women, and encourages more recognition for women when it comes to awards ceremonies like the IBMAs. Even so, women have received instrumental recognition from IBMA only on the banjo and the bass. Examples of these women include banjo player Kristen Scott Benson, who received the banjo player of the year award (2008, 2009, 2010) and bass player Missy Raines who received the bass player of the year award (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2007). Both have been acknowledged because of a certain historical association between women and banjo, and because they continually display their virtuosic talents (www.ibma.org).

Along with its racial connotations (see Conway, 1995), the banjo carries a masculine characterization. Yet, contrary to notions that the banjo is strictly a masculine instrument, women have skillfully played the banjo for quite some time. Lydia Hamessley (2007), using evidence from historic stereoscopes of women playing banjo as her focal point, explains that in early 19th-century America, women frequently played the banjo at a time when the instrument was becoming increasingly "acceptable in white bourgeois society" (p. 132). The depictions of women playing banjo challenge "conventional notions of gender" and shows "an inversion of roles," as Hamessley states (p. 136-137).

Thus, as early as the 19th century, women slowly began to alter gender roles within the musical realm. In fact, society felt that the banjo better suited females in general. Author Karen

Linn (1994) confirms this stating, “Americans no longer viewed the banjo as only the object of plantation blacks and blackface minstrels; it was also an appropriate instrument for young women” (p. 35). Linn also states that banjos were advertised “as being more appropriate than guitars for ladies, claiming that guitar playing caused women to sit in an unfeminine position, and banjo strings were less likely to hurt delicate fingers than guitar strings” (p. 23). This longstanding history of banjo existing as a suitable instrument for women perhaps explains why today the IBMA seems to support the banjo as one of the more readily accepted instruments for women’s performance.

Beyond the mandolin and banjo, instrumental ability also appears in backup instrumental performance, including the upright bass. One of the biggest problems with women achieving prestige on the bass centers on the ideas that, through the eyes of male musicians, the bass is the easiest instrument to play and therefore unworthy of praise. More positively, Mary Clawson (1999) suggests that the bass provides a more accessible way for women to work their way into the rock genre. Clawson provides evidence that men in rock prefer to learn the more virtuosic instruments, and those perceived as the most difficult, thus leaving the easier instruments unmanned. Clawson’s male informants “assumed that women, more than men, would be drawn to an instrument with lower skill requirements and/or a faster learning curve” (p. 199). Similarly Leslie Gay (1998) suggests that bass guitar players generally hold less power in a band than other instruments (p. 90). If so, the fact that women gravitate toward the bass allows them access into a male dominated genre; however, at the same time, this particular instrumental association

ironically places them lower in the rock music hierarchy, a place they continually try to move away from.

Yet, even while men in both rock and bluegrass view the bass as an easily learned and less valued instrument, it carries clear structural importance. The bass provides harmonic and rhythmic support to the band, while, similarly, women historically have provided supportive roles in social and familial situations (Clawson, pp. 204-205). Clawson's (1998) female informants draw a further parallel between women and the bass, viewing both in supportive roles. Gay (1998) states that the "bass guitar is also an instrument without negative associations for women, allowing for new configurations of meanings and relationships" (p. 90).

Jessica agrees that the bass fits female roles and sensibilities, stating that although the bass is relatively easy to learn, it takes skill and commitment to play the bass effectively in a group setting. Indeed, playing the bass in a bluegrass band requires much more responsibility than one might expect. Jessica explains: "several people say that they think that women make very good bass players because they are very stable and supportive and play that role well" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). Jessica agrees and further states, "the bass player always has to be there for everything to fit properly" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). Jessica draws on her own experiences to further place the bass player in an important role:

> I think being a bass player too...it's an interesting role because I get to sit back, and I play 2 notes per measure as opposed to Chris on banjo who might play 6 or 8 or 9 or whatever, and you know the other guys taking breaks...and all that's going through my head is to

> keep the rhythm steady and support what they're doing (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009).

Thus, even though the bass carries a stigma as an easy instrument to play, Jessica recognizes the significant contribution that she makes to the band as the bass player. Here Jessica's own musical role providing stable rhythm allows for the other band members to engage in the virtuosic playing that is typical of the bluegrass style.

Communal and Vocal versus Individual and Instrumental

Bluegrass as a profession presents more individualistic ideals and fewer communal ideals. To gain legitimacy in bluegrass, the virtuosic ability of a given musician holds great importance. Bluegrass too, like heavy metal, has a sacralized system of aesthetics and learning, one that values skill, canon, and soloistic playing. While men are often presumed to possess the capacity for talent, women are viewed as fundamentally lacking in such skills. Therefore, women musicians are held to expectations and deemed to fall short of these in ways that men are not. Legitimacy in bluegrass music depends upon the authenticity through virtuosity that women cannot fulfill, thus creating impenetrable boundaries and developing a less communal atmosphere for women.

Like jazz and rock music, bluegrass relies on individualistic virtuosity and thereby creates gendered values. A less than fully communal environment results, as opposed to genres like old-time music, which achieves a greater extent of communal participation. R.A. Harman (1943) focuses on virtuosity in various genres of music, stating that jazz music unusually values expertise: "the only sphere in which the instrumental virtuoso is acclaimed as a virtuoso (in fact

he can be nothing more) is in the realm of Jazz" (p. 330). Harman further acknowledges that talent exemplifies greatness in other realms such as bluegrass and rock music. The importance of virtuosity in bluegrass borrows sounds and structure from jazz.

With traditional and authentic ideas about bluegrass so heavily engrained in the genre, and commercial and folk categorizations often confused, women continue to struggle to achieve full acceptance in both the individual and communal realms of bluegrass music. As Turino (2008) states,

> we choose to foreground certain aspects of ourselves (occupation, color, religion, gender, age) for self-presentation, or have those aspects chosen for us, depending on what is socially important in a given context and within the society at large (p. 103).

In the same way, bluegrass culture foregrounds gender as providing a socially important determiner of identity. In short, ultimately gender trumps women's participation in the communal and individual realms that Turino discusses.

That audience expectations serve to perpetuate tradition, especially in the case of older audiences, demonstrates Turino's ideas regarding old and new and the older generation's need for authenticity. Tammy Rogers expresses this value system in discussing older generations of male bluegrass musicians who variously portray women as incapable of authentic and virtuosic performance (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009). For example, with regard to older--or first and second generation-- bluegrass performers like Ralph Stanley and Del McCoury, Tammy discusses how infrequently these men play with women. In reference to the exclusion of women, Tammy states,

> I haven't seen Del McCoury ever have a girl in his band full time. I haven't seen Ralph Stanley have a female in his band full time. I mean they record with women all the time in the studio and things like that, so I don't know. I mean, I think that with the older generation that is probably a truer situation (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009).

Older generations have more conservative outlooks on bands with mixed genders. Tammy's comment here demonstrates an obvious bias against women that still prevails, one that diminishes women's talents as inauthentic. In turn, female vocalists are most readily associated with country as women's voices cannot recreate Bill Monroe's high lonesome sound. Because of the legacy of Monroe, notions of authentic bluegrass include ideas of masculinity.

Yet the industry pressures women to remain in the commercial realm as opposed to an authentic realm. As vocalists these women uphold a more commercial sound than is accepted in traditional bluegrass. Their image tends to further reflect this commercial realm and its association with femininity. In many cases, commercially successful bluegrass women present themselves visually as country musicians would, with flashy and sexualized clothing (as discussed in the Chapter 4). That these bluegrass women exhibit country music characteristics, and are forced to do so, suggests that, for women, bluegrass often strays from the authenticity that it seeks to retain.

CHAPTER IV
"BEYOND THE GENRE": THE FEMALE IMAGE, AUTHENTICITY AND HYBRIDITY IN BLUEGRASS MUSIC

"Perhaps the only way of resisting the pressures pushing women musicians into conventional stereotypes (and stereotyping is an inevitable result of commercialization) was to do as Joni Mitchell did and avoid prolonged contact with the mass media" (Simon Frith, 1990, p. 377).

"I think we're living in an age where most of us have been brought up to basically think that we can have it all as women...the conflict for most of us I think becomes and internal one" (Tammy Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009).

As the music industry attempts to increase profits in as many ways as possible, women in bluegrass music often choose to assume prescribed gender roles to make a name for themselves. Traditionally, women have had limited roles in the music industry. As Simon Frith (2007) contends, "female creative roles are limited and mediated through male notions of female ability. Women musicians who make it are almost always singers; the women in the business who make it are usually in publicity; in both roles success goes with a male-made female image" (p. 43). According to this statement, women primarily gain success in ways that the male industry constructs. This male-made female image is also perpetuated by women whose efforts in the music industry are shaped by patriarchal ideals. This fact again emphasizes Judith Butler's ideas that even as women oppose the system, they also may reinforce it.

Along with male construction of the female image, women face challenges in achieving success due to bluegrass music's notions of authenticity; further, these norms are reinforced by the music industry. But with younger generations taking up the genre and bluegrass' interaction with other sounds and styles, hybrid versions of bluegrass music have started to develop. Frith's concept of hybridity depicts new musical identities. At the same time, Frith ties in traditional

ideals saying, “hybridity is a new name for a familiar process: local musics are rarely culturally pure” (p. 311). Furthering this idea, he explains, “musical traditions are only preserved by constant innovation” (p. 311). In other words, a sense of tradition keeps certain cultures alive, but as younger generations take interest in these traditions, hybridization increasingly occurs. Author Adam Stetson (2006) confirms this notion saying, “the reality is that the roots of bluegrass are a classic American story of hybridization, innovation, and experimentation, and the current generation of artists, far from debating the tradition is continuing and enriching it” (p. 11).

The bluegrass industry can also be understood from the perspective of Timothy Taylor’s model of hybridity. Bluegrass as a genre has developed and changed with the incorporation of outside influences. Taylor’s (2007) metaphor of hybridity acknowledges how musics once defined by strict ideals embrace new characteristics and sounds over time. Taylor states, “The popularity of the metaphor of hybridity has meant that older discourses of authenticity are no longer the only ways that the music industry labels musics from other places, and that western listeners apprehend musics from other places” (p. 140).

Along with male concepts of authenticity, women in bluegrass perpetuate masculine notions of the female image. Images created by contemporary women in country music and bluegrass commonly exhibit an overtly feminine and sexualized appearance. While such choices might appear to play to masculine rules, on the contrary, I argue that these women choose their feminine images as a matter of personal expression and empowerment. Thus, the excessively feminine image seen today in fact counters the historical pressures that male producers placed on women. Rather, we see in such femininity a display of the freedom women have obtained in

controlling their own physical image. While some feminine musicians stray from an overtly sexual appearance, others, like Dolly Parton, Allison Krauss, and Rhonda Vincent, embrace it; they adopt the same images of femininity that men have historically promoted, but use these to their advantage.

Although bluegrass values its claims to authenticity, hybridization remains an essential part of its character. Further, increasing hybridization allows for greater inclusion of female musicians. Primarily, women achieve success in two ways: through their acceptance and manipulation of socially accepted female images; and through bluegrass' increasing acceptance of musical hybridization in terms of style and sound. Using the works of Timothy Taylor (2007), Simon Frith (2004, 2007), Mark Fenster (1998), Mavis Bayton (1997, 1998), Keith Negus (1992), and others, this chapter demonstrates how, on the one hand, women in the bluegrass industry retain certain traditional gender roles through their image. At the same time, notions of authenticity as "false" and increasing hybridization of bluegrass as a genre provide women with substantial amounts of commercial and personal success.

As bluegrass proves a predominantly male run industry, it has created a system that places people, particularly women, in certain roles due to gender biases. In bluegrass, gender exists as an active variable that differentiates the success of a given artist. Women currently make up a small percentage of important positions in the music industry as a whole. Negus (1992) states, "women I spoke to in both the United States and Britain frequently spoke of the way in which higher management and key decision-making jobs were dominated by an 'old boys

network' or 'boys club'--a milieu in which women were not welcome" (pp. 126-127). As Negus points out, the industry suppresses women by limiting them to circumscribed roles.

In performance, society provides women with minor roles as well. As mentioned, women in bluegrass mostly situate themselves as vocalists or backup musicians on instruments such as rhythm guitar and bass. Women occupy less authentically accepted roles within the genre due to ideas of traditionalism as discussed in Chapter 2.

Something Pretty: The Creation of the Female Image

The ways in which women market themselves in the music industry and bluegrass music particularly are key in understanding their current roles. Each genre of music cultivates a given look, sound, and style. Since Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys first performed publicly, bluegrass musicians have historically dressed with style and sophistication. He and his musicians set a precedent for bluegrass musicians' attire. As such, wearing suits and cowboy hats were the outfits commonly seen in bluegrass concerts.

During the WWII era, Bufwack (1998) argues, women "objected to the images created for them by powerful men in the entertainment industry. Far from compelling women to adopt more sexual or alluring images, these men forced a conservative image on them, and audience preference, rather than the men's ideology, was used as the rationale" (p. 161).

Originally defined as a male-only style of music, bluegrass tradition denies the complete removal of gendered bias and stereotypes toward women and the images they choose for themselves through marketing and advertising of female performers. Conflicting with many of the strong feminist ideals of contemporary western society, the music industry pressures women

to conform to patriarchally prescribed roles. Mavis Bayton (1998) recognizes this idea in discussing female images in rock music, pointing out how women musicians often hold conflicting desires. She states, “feminists have wanted to avoid being seen as sex-objects, but they have still wanted to look attractive and the resulting space of manoeuvre has proved to be narrow” (p. 181). Whiteley (2000) similarly explains, “front-line performers [in rock] were expected to *look* feminine” and “to achieve success, it seemed that women had to take men on at their own game, and within the arena of rock this involved drink, drugs and sexual promiscuity” (p. 51). This notion emphasizes that to obtain musical prestige, women had to accept male ideas of femininity.

Even so, scholars like Thaxton and Jaret (1985) find changing female images in the realm of popular music. They suggest:

> that even though the female performer of popular music has been operating in a male-dominated industry, has sung many of the lyrics that reinforce a stereotyped portrait, and has often had to promote herself in a sexist manner, there are several reasons to expect that women singers have transcended the common female imagery found in our popular culture” (p. 259).

Thus, while women sometimes accentuate and reinforce historically masculine notions, they find ways to adapt such conventions to their own needs and desires, and to achieve success.

Even in coed groups a clear division of labor exists. Frith (1990) discusses how the male run industry packages the female image in rock music; he implies here that men take on more active roles and females more passive ones (see Chapter 2). Frith uses the singing group ABBA

to show these divisions, stating, "the men make the music" and "the women are glamourous (they dress up and sing what they're told, their instruments are their 'natural voices and bodies)" (p. 9). This description suggests that women's talent and success are based on their looks and little else.

Indeed, the subject of women as the object of the male gaze appears frequently within musical scholarship. Susan McClary (2002) discusses the male gaze in opera and its application to the pop icon Madonna. McClary finds that Madonna uniquely "takes control of her erotic self-representation, insisting on her right to construct rather than deny her sexuality" and "derive[s] power from being a *knowing* 'object' of the male gaze" (pp. 138-139). Similar instances arise in opera, as McClary explains, "it is constructions of *feminine* sensuality and suffering that are exhibited--for the pleasure of the patriarchal gaze and ear" (p. 50).

Frequently having to adhere to the industry's standards, women in country music have struggled with their image choices. While encountering the music industries limitations, bluegrass women like Dolly Parton, Alison Krauss, and Rhonda Vincent have found ways to stay true to their own identities and achieve success. In country music, Shania Twain deals with the industry's restrictions too, but triumphantly follows her own rules in terms of image and identity. Beverly Keel (2004) states that Twain continually encountered scrutiny for her appearance; her video "Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under," which "caused quite a stir, and Country Music Television, the industry's video network, reacted 'coolly' to Twain's video because it was too sexy" (p. 173). Even as the industry has criticized Twain's appearance, she continually experiences musical accomplishment.

On the other hand, the country music industry neglects to recognize men's sensual attire. Keel explicates this idea, stating that while the industry disapproves of country women's alluring attire, men have freedom to dress more sexually. She states, "Garth Brooks has admitted that he wears his Wranglers two sizes too small when performing and several other males singers frequently don circulation-hampering jeans in hopes of drawing their fans' eyes to their private parts" (p. 173). Although the industry allows men to profit from their sexuality, Twain's reception shows that women earn disapproval when they choose to display a sexy image. Keel also states, "using sex to sell country music isn't unique to Shania Twain; she's just the best at it" (p. 173). This suggests that women both assume risk and win recognition in their use of a sexual image, which in turn threatens male performers in their attempts to find and maintain their musical achievements.

Country music and bluegrass also position women as objects of the male gaze. Today, some country and bluegrass women have vibrant and extremely feminine clothing. In most cases these women knowingly construct their image around patriarchal expectations. Dolly Parton, for instance, has created her own image and sound and has found great musical achievement. Wilson (1998) delves into the many contradictions presented by Parton's star image, unraveling the source of her great popularity. Wilson comments on Parton's "excessive womanliness," stating that along with Parton's well rounded business abilities, "Parton openly discusses the strategies she employs for the construction of her image in almost every interview, and she makes no secret of the fact that the Dolly image is a facade she has created to market herself" (p. 100). Parton's exorbitantly womanly and sexy female image appears to accept patriarchal molds for the female

gender; but Parton uses her self construction to her advantage. She creates and displays a lavishly feminine image of her own accord (Appendix, see Figure 3.1).

Dolly Parton's unique sense of feminism, Wilson argues, is aided by the development of her outward appearance. Parton states, "When I started out in my career, I was plainer looking. I soon realized I had to play by men's rules to win" (cited in Wilson, p. 101). Even though she accepts masculine ideals for women, her exaggeration and distortion of these ideals become a site of empowerment for Parton. Wilson comments further:

> some feminists have spoken out against the objectification of women's bodies as fetishes of male desire...Dolly Parton, by managing and manipulating her sexual image in such a way as to attain the maximum response from the male gaze while maintaining her own dignity and self-esteem, is making patriarchal discourse work to her own advantage (p. 104).

The fact that feminists speak out against Parton's choices is understandable, as she enacts men's stereotypes about women. But her control of her own image allows for Parton to embrace her femininity and still attain musical growth in a male dominated industry. Susan McClary (1991) makes a similar argument regarding Madonna's musical career, arguing that Madonna has contradicted male notions of femininity and embraced her own female image toward her own end (pp. 148-150). Even as some see Madonna's image as a male fantasy, generally her videos and performances exemplify Madonna's acceptance of her sexualized body--a historically contested site--as well as her own confidence in herself. Accepting prescribed stereotypes may

seem a potentially counterproductive way for women to attain musical achievements, but women like Dolly Parton thrive on it

Playing to southern stereotypes, Parton experiences another possible conflict in terms of her image and or self definition. Wilson (1998) argues that genres like country music reinforce southern conventions. She states, "the country music industry contributes to it [stereotyping] by constructing notions of 'southernness' or 'country-ness' to which consumers can subscribe" (p. 107). In part, country music emphasizes such stereotypes as a means of marketing: fans listen to music that they find relatable, as they find feelings or storylines in country music that resonate with them. However, Dolly Parton again exaggerates and employs such conventions of southernness to her own advantage. As Wilson states, Parton has "played with and exploited cultural stereotypes of style and taste--not only in terms of femininity, but also with respect to Southern Appalachian, rural and/or working-class culture" (p. 111).

Bluegrass women like Rhonda Vincent dress to impress as well, but they also demand recognition for their musical talent. Their extravagantly feminine images lead one to question why these women embrace male dictated stereotypes for the feminine gender. However, the choice to embrace images of femininity displays their self confidence rather than an attempt to fulfill masculinized ideals. In this way, Vincent follows in the path of Patsy Cline, who refused to change her image to meet music industry norms. Although Vincent, unlike Cline, chooses to present an excessively feminine image, she and Cline both take independent control of their image. Cline, followed her own intuition and upheld an image that she felt comfortable in. Joli Jenson (1993) explains that even though the industry tried to mold Cline toward a pop image and

style, Cline refused, holding true to her own country music identity, wearing glittery western outfits and cowgirl boots. Cline rejected such industry pressures, Jenson explains, because "for Patsy, to go pop was to abandon an identity and a connection to her background, beliefs, experience" (p. 43).

Similarly, in addressing the female image, my informants support women presenting themselves in ways that make them feel good. On Rhonda Vincent's elaborate garb, Tammy states, "She's really carved a great niche for herself. Um, I don't know whether she just loves wearing evening gowns...I mean that's kinda her thing and maybe her fan base appreciates that and thinks its pretty cool you know" (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009). In this way, Rhonda Vincent has created an ideal position for herself within the music industry. In fact, some fans prefer a more elegant and dressed up appearance. Tammy found it interesting that one of her own fans was concerned about how she and her band dressed, saying that they did not look very professional and they should dress more appropriately (Rogers, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2009). The uniform and formal dress these fans expect draws from the presentation of Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys as well as The Stanley Brothers in bluegrass' early days.

On Vincent's newest album, *Taken*, she embraces her femininity by wearing a royal blue, shiny, low cut top that emphasizes her feminine physique (Appendix, see Figure 4.1). She has a deep lingering gaze in her eyes, drawing the onlooker in. One may question if Vincent adopts this look because it attracts listeners or if Vincent just enjoys excessive glamour, as Tammy suggests. In either case, Vincent's musical achievement is demonstrated by the fact that she has

won female vocalist for seven consecutive years (www.ibma.org). It appears, then, that both Vincent's musical abilities and her glamourous, sensual self portrayal have aided her commercial success and industry recognition.

Certain bluegrass stars, like Alison Krauss, have grown up in front of their fans, changing both their sounds and styles over their long careers. Many young musicians struggle with the desire to appear more mature as their careers progress into adulthood. As Krauss' image varied, particularly by addressing a more popular audience, so did the number of fans who listened to her, increasing greatly over time. Jessica acknowledges this shift, adding that it occurred "when her [Krauss'] music became more mainstream sounding" and when "stylists got a hold of her" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009). When asked if she thought women were pressured into appearing more glamorous, Jessica agreed: "I think so, somewhat, if they're trying to go for a more mainstream audience and have a more mass appeal kind of sound than strictly just traditional bluegrass" (J. Smith, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2009).

My informants find a disjunction between women embracing extreme femininity and women demonstrating virtuosic talent within bluegrass music. With regard to the more popular image created by Krauss, Linda Bobbitt states, "I didn't like that one. I don't like the whole sex appeal thing" (Bobbitt, personal communication, Aug. 21, 2010). Linda feels that exhibiting such flashy and alluring outfits draws attention away from true musicianship and creates less respect for a woman's musical abilities in the eyes of male performers or fans. In their own performances, my informants do not cultivate an overly feminine image, but rather dress according to comfort. When I observed Tammy Rogers in the Steeldrivers, she wore jeans and a

t-shirt that featured an artistic image with a touch of sparkle. Jessica wore and casual skirt, basic shirt, with a sweater and boots. Linda, like Tammy, wore jeans, a t-shirt and black boots. These women choose to focus more on their musicianship and less on their image; they view their anti-commercial stance and comparatively understated femininity as a means of demonstrating their musical accomplishments.

Commercialism and Authenticity versus Hybridity in Bluegrass

As stated in Chapter 3, issues of authenticity and the commercialization of bluegrass create problems for women seeking musical recognition within the genre. Richard Peterson (1997) explains the concept of authenticity as a fabricated notion. The "fabrication of authenticity," as he puts it, "is used here to highlight the fact that authenticity is not inherent in the object or even that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree misremembered" (p. 5). The authenticity that bluegrass strives to preserve then proves a purely artificial notion as the bluegrass canon is a "socially agreed-upon construct" in which the past is "misremembered." Hardcore traditionalists have created an "authentic" bluegrass convention to preserve the music of Bill Monroe, thus glorifying the traditions of the past, including virtuosity and masculinity.

Notions of authenticity have produced a bluegrass canon that regulates the production of the music and who performs it. Fenster (1998) states:

> the reenactment of tradition in contemporary bluegrass music attempts to deny the present (and specifically the Other[s] of such mainstream popular forms as commercial

> country music) by constituting its traditions as an authentic past and by basing this authenticity on the practice of bluegrass itself (p. 77).

This statement supports the idea that a bluegrass canon does exist in any absolute sense. Accordingly, bluegrass music must express this authenticity as it relies on these "reenactment[s] of tradition," unlike country music which has varied greatly over time and often encompasses popular music influences. This statement confirms bluegrass music's dependence on tradition, which perpetuates women's constant struggle to find importance within the genre.

The conventions created by early bluegrass musicians, like Bill Monroe, discourage alterations in the style. Contrastingly country music, like the popular music model, proves more overtly driven by altered market trends over time. Bluegrass musicians thus face the issue of either maintaining tradition or "selling out," as Fenster states. He explains, "this situation both corresponds to the notion of bluegrass as an 'authentic,' 'folk' form and conflicts with the nature of bluegrass as a commercial enterprise" (p. 85). Limiting their acceptance, female bluegrass musicians exemplify a more commercial sound and appearance than traditional bluegrass fans and musicians expect. But selling out presents less of an issue for those country and bluegrass musicians who are considered crossover or hybrid artists. This affirmation of hybridity therefore advances the acceptance of women in bluegrass music.

Female vocalists create a unique conundrum in bluegrass culture due to conflicting perceptions of authenticity and hybridity. In both communal and individual spheres, the need for authenticity, i.e. virtuosic instrumental ability and the "high lonesome sound," limits spectrums of activity for women. First, one would expect only a small population of female vocalists in

bluegrass music, as most women cannot viably reproduce the "high lonesome sound" required in bluegrass. Yet, on the contrary, many female vocalists have attained enormous success in bluegrass, including Alison Krauss, Rhonda Vincent, Dolly Parton, and Emmylou Harris. The high numbers of female singers in bluegrass suggests that women vocalists in particular experience more communal acceptance in bluegrass than do women instrumentalists.

The close association between the female voice and popular music, leads the music industry to in turn associate women with commercialism and mass produced music. These commercial ideals then occupy a feminized sphere and contradict notions of authenticity. Simon Frith (1990) addresses this idea in noting that common perceptions link popular music with a more feminine outlook on music, and rock strictly with masculinity (p. 32). Bourdieu (1993) similarly discusses ideas behind commercialism, stating, "producers and vendors of cultural goods who 'go commercial' condemn themselves, and not only from an ethical or aesthetic point of view" (p. 75). Bourdieu thus relates "commercial" success as a kind of selling out. Similarly, with regard to bluegrass women, traditionalists may perceive female bluegrass musician's association with the commercial as a form of selling out. As bluegrass characterizes itself as an "authentic" genre, women as vocalists must continually strive for legitimacy and recognition.

In bluegrass, adherence to traditional values limits individual creativity and career paths. Like other genres, bluegrass, as a necessity, has developed and refashioned itself since its creation. Adam Stetson (2006) confirms this notion stating, "'recently invented' rituals and traditions are some of our most effective tools for negotiating the complexities of our modern

world while still remaining engaged in a dialogue with our history" (p. 3). Simply stated, although changes occur, foundations in tradition still frequent our culture.

Mark Fenster (1998) shows that even as new listeners and younger generations become interested in bluegrass, many of older fans prefer the "authenticated" sound created by first generation bluegrass performers; this preference privileges stasis and prevents positive change. Thus, a more contemporary sounding bluegrass band faces challenges. These musicians find only limited acceptance in their pursuit for recognition in certain regions of the United States. Fenster gives an example of a band from the West Coast who, "as something other than a bluegrass band because of [their] contemporary folk sound and the absence of banjo from most of [their] recordings" (p. 84), struggle to find success in certain regions of the United States. This statement suggests that a contemporary sound, especially in particular regions, deters traditional fans from embracing progressive bands as true bluegrass music. These legacies carry gender implications as well. Younger bands often prove more receptive not only to new sounds, but also to women and their voices.

In terms of gender, Fenster's study of the commercialization in bluegrass finds that even hybridized bluegrass music tends to feature all male performers. These men stray from the "authentic" sound of bluegrass, yet they still retain their bluegrass status. This suggests that the creation of hybrid styles is more problematic for female rather than male musicians. Fenster explains, "bluegrass provides a solid background and excellent training for developing musicians, but it also limits them in terms of how much acclaim can be achieved and how much money can be earned" (p. 85). As stated above, women in bluegrass experience these limitations

more so than men. Not only do they find difficulty in recreating the "high lonesome sound" of traditional bluegrass music, they also fail to meet bluegrass expectations for the ruggedness, individuality, and authenticity modeled by Monroe.

The dichotomy of bluegrass as both commercial and folk, along with strong efforts to retain its "authentic" ideals, has frequently caused conflict for female bluegrass musicians. With regard to authenticity, Fenster (1998) discusses an ongoing problem with bluegrass and its classification as either commercial or folk, one that enlightens the struggles of female musicians. Women's association with the commercial, and bluegrass' relationship with folk, problematize women's opportunity for equal treatment. Ideas of authenticity play a major role in how the bluegrass audience perceives the music as either commercial or folk.

The website of the bluegrass band *The Steeldrivers* exemplifies such notions. The name of the band itself and their clothing as depicted on the site employ ideas of tradition and authenticity (thesteeldrivers.net); their presentation especially evokes nostalgia for the history of hardworking Southern families and the difficulties they have borne. Their background displays a picture of old, rusty wheel drums and axles. Rendering impressions of the Appalachian region's difficult history, this image conjures up ideas of hard labor and rough times, like the film *O Brother Where Art Though?* (2000). The biographic section depicts the male band members in typical western wear, like that worn by early country singers, while Tammy is dressed plainly in black. This suggests a distinct differentiation in terms of authenticity and where men and women stand in bluegrass as a genre. The men in this group display traditional bluegrass wear while Tammy is presented in a way that stands out from her male counterparts by wearing a black

blouse. This may associate her with a more mainstream image or with the conventions ofWestern Art music, differentiating her from her male counterparts (Appendix, see Figure 5.1-5.5).

This website in some ways also depicts Frith's (2000) notion of "displayed expertise," which links to ideas of virtuosity. In the biography section, as well as in photos and videos, each band member prominently displays his or her instrument of expertise (Appendix, see Figure 5.1-5.5). The band consists of Richard Bailey on banjo, Mike Fleming on bass and vocals, Mike Henderson on mandolin, Gary Nichols on guitar and vocals, and Tammy Rogers on fiddle and vocals. The fact that Tammy displays virtuosic talent on the fiddle shows progress in bluegrass as it moves away from ideas of instrumentalism as a solely masculine tradition.

Tammy and her male counterparts exemplify expertise through their personal photos and biographies in different ways (http://steeldrivers.net/bio.htm). Tammy's picture displays similarities to that of and orchestral head shot, possibly indicating that she holds virtuosic expertise in her instrument and bestowing on her a kind of musical legitimacy. Her male counterparts, on the other hand, uphold the traditional, and more informal, bluegrass manner of dress, including embellished western shirts and cowboy hats. Their wardrobe choices accentuate the male band members' more easy accordance with traditional bluegrass culture.

Nonetheless, bluegrass tradition still calls for a certain sound and vocal style, one that women cannot duplicate. This situation prompts female bluegrass musicians to assert themselves vocally within the genre in hybridized ways. In their bands, bluegrass women generally still use the core bluegrass instruments, and these instruments maintain their traditional roles. All three bands that I observed included the guitar, mandolin, fiddle, banjo and bass. Instead, the primary

differences among the groups manifest in their vocal styles. Linda's band has a softer, laid back feel, while Jessica's band strives for a hard driving, traditional bluegrass sound, and Tammy's band incorporates more blues and rock sounds in their vocals.

For example, the Steeldrivers' music exemplifies hybridity as it indirectly associates bluegrass with the rock world. The title of their website "Uneasy Listening: The Steeldrivers" implies a sense of tumultuous history, one that reflects the rough past of the people of the Appalachian region, but combined with a novelty that might cause listeners discomfort or uncertainty. Their website provides samples tracks of their music, which demonstrate a rough-around-the-edges feel and unique sound. For example, in the songs "Blue Side of the Mountain" and "Midnight Train To Memphis" (Steeldrivers, 2008). the lead singer provides rock'n'roll and blues style vocals, with bluegrass style harmonies. Meanwhile the band performs heavy driving instrumental breaks influenced by virtuosic blues and jazz licks.

Female musicians who reject or fail to conform to traditional and or "authentic" ideals must deviate from the traditional bluegrass sound in order to find ways into the music. Fenster (1998) explains that performers often find it easier to cross over to country music, as is the case for some female bluegrass performers. He gives examples of performers like Ricky Skaggs, Marty Stuart, Mark O'Connor, and Jerry Douglas (pp. 79-85). These musicians exemplify a strongly country influenced sound; yet, they are recognized as both country and bluegrass musicians, a situation that once again confuses the meaning of "authentic" within the genre.

This friction, as Fenster (1998) describes it, exists between the bluegrass traditionalists, who believe in following the "somewhat rigid conventions of the genre," and more

contemporary-minded musicians, who have a "desire to construct an individual style and to set themselves apart from other artists" (p. 317). As a unique example, Krauss began as a bluegrass performer and then branched out, creating an individual musical style. As she did so, she retained numerous fans, including bluegrass listeners as well as enthusiasts of other genres such as country. Through her innovations in the bluegrass style, Krauss also crosses the line between that of producer and consumer. Even while she consumes bluegrass music and reworks the classics, she produces a new style and amalgamation of sounds.

Controversies surrounding Krauss' musical sound and choices inform my discussion of authenticity within bluegrass. For some, Krauss' musical innovations may seem commercially motivated and to taint the purity of an Appalachian tradition. For example, music from her album *Lonely Runs Both Ways* (2004) embraces modern sounds; it is less hard-driving and includes softer musical qualities typical of country music. Accordingly, Krauss' music is sometimes perceived as country music, and strong believers in tradition find Krauss' transformations controversial. Fenster (1993) discusses how, nonetheless, bluegrass artists like Krauss continually carve their own paths and how they "can and should expand the musical and commercial limits of bluegrass" (p. 325). The popularity of Krauss, along with other visionary women, allow bluegrass to incorporate a variety of commercial sounds in ways that benefit bluegrass as a whole. The broadening of musical sound within the genre allows for bluegrass to reach wider audiences and creates greater accessibility for typically non-bluegrass listeners.

In keeping with the notion of hybridity, major bluegrass organizations such as the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) have struggled to promote a commercial yet

simultaneously traditional bluegrass sound (Fenster, 1998, pp. 74-76). Major bluegrass organizations problematically endeavor to promote bluegrass more widely while still retaining its authentic character. The International Bluegrass Awards (IBMAs) provides a venue where bluegrass musicians come together to recognize hard working musicians within the genre. As a bluegrass association, however, the IBMA struggles with a conflict of interest: while striving to retain tradition, it limits artists in their creativity as it more readily rewards musicians who hold to bluegrass conventions. Fenster states of the organization:

> But on the other hand, the conservative constraints of "preservation," in terms of the association's notion of "tradition," their regulation of the instruments that can be played on stage or in jam sessions, and their commitment to preserving the body of material that comprises the bluegrass "canon," are perceived by some institutions and performers as potentially limiting the commercial opportunities for bluegrass to reach new audiences (p. 82).

The ways in which many performers of bluegrass music find the bluegrass "canon" limiting explains why women like Krauss branch out to other genres like country music, which are historically more accepting of women.

Notably, the IBMA does not formally define bluegrass. Accordingly, the fact that only musicians holding true to bluegrass tradition receive acceptance appears unfair to those striving for a new sound. Fenster discusses this saying, "[IBMA] promotes bluegrass, yet adamantly eschews any 'definition' of it; and it coordinates activities that it neither dictates nor regulates" (p. 86). Because they avoid defining the genre, the IBMA struggles in its efforts to

unify the bluegrass industry (p. 86). However, contrary to Fenster's discussion of these struggles, the unification of bluegrass musicians and fans does happen on its own. For example, events like bluegrass festivals bring musicians and fans together in a positive communal atmosphere. And while the IBMA does not define bluegrass music, their allowance of subcategories like "contemporary" and "progressive" bluegrass music, seemingly helps women to participate more easily in the genre. Still, the awards given rarely recognize women, as men win the majority of the time (IBMA.org). Those women who are recognized by the IBMAs under the umbrella label of bluegrass music tend to stray from the traditional bluegrass sound. For example, banjo player Abigail Washburn caters to a more folk revival sound, while banjo player Alison Brown incorporates piano in her music.

Commercial ideas present in bluegrass conflict with the strong ideals of authenticity placed on early bluegrass music. As bluegrass music traditionally does not allow for female singers, with its "high lonesome sound" set aside for male musicians, female singers and musicians appear to stray from these reenacted traditions present in the genre. Yet, today these female musicians are generally classified in the bluegrass category, even though they have a commercial appeal. This indicates that to some extent the bluegrass industry embraces the hybrid sounds of female bluegrass musicians and their voices.

Today's bluegrass industry presents two models for artists to gain success: geographical or regional success is typically obtained by frequent touring; while crossing over to country music typically enables one to obtain a wider audience through commercial means. Well known female bluegrass musicians, although wanting equal acceptance from men, seem to play toward

stereotyped representations of women; they cultivate feminized qualities in their image, as stated earlier, and also emphasize the popular or supportive aspects of their vocal sound and style. Bluegrass' largest trade association, the IBMA, specifies a category for female vocalists separate from male vocalists, suggesting that the music industry is still patriarchally defined.

New classifications in bluegrass music accentuate the acceptance of new sounds and styles; often such genres are hybridizations of traditional bluegrass music with other more popular forms. As the authentic vocal sound of bluegrass music initially creates barriers for women, it seems almost inevitable that female bluegrass musicians will stray from tradition in various ways. Some female artists align themselves with sounds typical of the folk revival era, whereas others adopt the more popular country sound. In both cases, organizations like the IBMA do acknowledge such music as bluegrass, although on a limited scale.

As I have noted previously, Alison Krauss represents an unusual example of a woman who branches away from traditional bluegrass models yet still retains the bluegrass classification. Mark Fenster (1993) explains that Krauss' record company attempts to resolve tension "between her position as a bluegrass artist who is able to reach non-bluegrass audiences" and her iconic role as "an important example of the development of a contemporary bluegrass star who does not abandon or betray the crucial notion of bluegrass as a traditional form of music" (p. 318). Krauss' proven ability to branch out while still holding true to her bluegrass roots shows how innovation can provide success.

Bluegrass no longer exists as a purely "authentic" genre, a situation that leaves room for women's recognition as innovators and practitioners of a changing and hybridized style. Timothy

Taylor's (2007) concept of hybridity here provides an explanation for bluegrass' incorporation of more contemporary sounds. Fenster (1998) also supports this idea of hybridity stating:

> while tradition denotes an essential difference between authentic bluegrass and non-bluegrass for "preservationists," others in the bluegrass industry view "traditional" as one style among many (including "contemporary," "progressive," and various hybrids and shades) that are popular with record and ticket buyers and radio audiences (p. 82).

This idea of hybridity benefits women in their attempts to find success within this masculine genre. At the same time, these women must carefully choose their modes of innovation so as not to appear as selling out. Still, women frequently struggle and the IBMAs recognizes women less frequently than men for their hard work.

In bluegrass, associations with commercial and or popular media draw negative connotations. The epigraph by Simon Frith above interestingly correlates female musicians' success with how effectively they remove themselves from the complicated chaos of the mass media. This goal of removing oneself from the mass media to avoid the gendered stereotypes of the music industry conflicts with, but also reinforces, the roles played and images created by female bluegrass musicians today; some women attempt to avoid gender norms while others embrace them.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

"Mountain Heart's musical virtuosity, unmatched energy, and keen sense of entertainment dynamics have helped them to forge a highly unique sound, and stage show, which appeals to an incredibly wide variety of musical tastes." (www.mountainheart.com)

As I entered the Square Room in downtown Knoxville, I eagerly anticipated hearing the traditional bluegrass sound of the band Mountain Heart, an all male contemporary bluegrass band. Its members, ranging in ages, come from various areas throughout the southeastern United States. Their first song incorporated all of bluegrass' typical core instruments, along with driving rhythms that had the audience rowdy and on their feet. Older folks along with little children danced to and hollered their enjoyment of the music they were hearing. Then the band played their second song. Unlike traditional bluegrass music, this song drew more heavily from jazz and blues components rather than old-time and country music. This piece incorporated the piano as the focal instrument; I had been wondering why there was a piano on stage.

At this moment, I found my own thoughts slipping into the traditional line of thinking when it comes to bluegrass. I had to stop myself. At first I found this more contemporary sound displeasing, and found myself thinking that what I was hearing did not qualify as bluegrass. Yet, throughout the evening Mountain Heart continually incorporated the piano as a main instrument, and during the performance I realized that what I was seeing and hearing was the hybridity I discuss in Chapter 4 of this thesis. These younger bluegrass musicians demonstrated their personality and taste by incorporating new sounds and other musical influences into the bluegrass genre, creating a hybrid bluegrass sound.

I found the acceptance of their hybridized sound by this diverse Knoxville audience perplexing in terms of gender bias in bluegrass music. Just as these men strayed from traditional bluegrass sounds, so do bluegrass women. Yet the latter receive little recognition for their innovations, while the former are made widely welcome.

Little research exists on the specific roles women hold within bluegrass music. Although historical documentation exists on specific female musicians of the past, current research lacks an in-depth focus on recent female bluegrass musicians. My study explicates the roles that women currently fulfill based on my compilation of recent research, and my observations of three women who presently partake in the bluegrass music culture.

Traditionally society has provided women with limited roles within the domestic realm. Here women fulfill roles of mother and housekeeper, catering to the male gender. These roles have carried over into religion as well. Here, women have performed largely diminished roles. In some cases, churches have prohibited women from even singing with their congregations.

Appalachian history and stereotypes have continually informed and molded the roles that female bluegrass musicians occupy. Women's strong historical association with the voice, domesticity, and soft accompanimental instruments continues to create difficulty when they chose to perform publicly. And even women who have found small profit and success from performing outside the home, have still met with skepticism and scrutiny from traditionally minded people (mostly men) who believe women should remain in the domesticated sphere.

Historical accounts of early bluegrass display a gender bias that blocks female musicians from participating fully within the genre. But, as bluegrass musicians integrate new sounds and

styles to the genre, women in turn find greater acceptance within it. Within bluegrass, musicians continually break boundaries, display new sounds, and incorporate non-traditional instruments. With newer generations of musicians taking interest in bluegrass, the music itself is bound to change. As younger generations have many styles of music influencing them, remaining absolutely faithful to musical traditions holds musicians back both musically and creatively. My application of Turino's concept of communal versus individual helps explicate how and why women traditionally have found difficulty in achieving full acceptance in either realm.

Through their hard work, musical talent, and creative innovations women today obtain success in bluegrass. In the individual realm, women currently display their virtuosic talents, some of which are recognized by IBMA award nominations; some women even win in their categories; Kristen Scott Benson has won banjo player of the year for three years in a row and Allison Brown won the same award in 1991. Demonstrating women's more traditional associations with the voice and the communal realm, female vocalists like Rhonda Vincent, Alison Krauss, and Lynn Morris have won the IBMA female vocalist of the year three or more times each. Along with receiving awards within the bluegrass realm, these women also achieve commercial success through their association with country music. Gradually, music organizations and bluegrass fans have started to more readily recognize women for their hard work and talent.

Women have shown control in other aspects of their musical careers as well. Examples include Alison Krauss, who while performing her own music to a wide range of audiences, also produces other bluegrass bands (Goldsmith, 2004, pp. 277-280). Other women, like Rhonda

Vincent and Missy Raines, front their own bands as leaders, as evidenced by their band names: "Rhonda Vincent and the Rage" and "Missy Raines and the New Hip."

Hybridity has existed in bluegrass music for some time and although not frequently recognized by both musicians and fans, scholars have pointed out that the idea of an "authentic" music hardly exists; this holds true for bluegrass as well. Contrary to Bill Monroe's previously dictated traditional sound, the use of terms like "progressive" and "contemporary" bluegrass seem fitting as the emerging styles classified as bluegrass incorporate new and different sounds. As such, female bluegrass musicians for generations, although unrecognized till recently, have contributed to musical innovations and integrated their ideas into the music; Maybelle Carter's bluegrass guitar technique provides a substantial example of this, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Female bluegrass musicians incorporate the core instruments and display the hard-driving bluegrass sound created by Monroe, just like their male counterparts.

Women's representations of themselves and acceptance of conventionally male notions of femininity within bluegrass provides another example of women's struggle for recognition. While some women remove themselves from excessive femininity within the industry, women like Dolly Parton and Rhonda Vincent embrace an overtly sexual image and thrive professionally. In accepting their sexual identities and taking on roles historically prescribed by men, both women have authored their own level of success matching that of men.

My conversations with and observations of my informants reveal that gender biases still exist in general. But through dedication and passion, my informants and the performers I have discussed obtain a favorable position and personal fulfillment in bluegrass in various ways.

These women have proven to the male dominated bluegrass industry and traditionally minded fans that they too hold the talent and the abilities to carry out the roles bluegrass requires. These women encounter varying circumstances through generational and regional differences, and hold complex roles within their bands. Showing her strong will and determination, Linda displays her abilities in bluegrass music. She works hard for her skill and understanding of the inner workings of bluegrass music. As the oldest of my informants, Linda seems to participate in more traditionalist notions of bluegrass performance and aligns her thoughts with those of men, possibly allowing her more acceptance in a sense. Namely, she accepts her role within the band as the bass player, a traditionally female gendered instrument that emphasizes support and unity more than virtuosity and individuality.

Confronting limitations historically placed on female musicians as vocalists, Jessica has shown that playing the bass embodies more responsibility than initially understood by musicians and fans. Although she sings lead and harmony vocals in her band, she does so in ways that demonstrate the significance of her own roles, both important and supportive.

Tammy, after experiencing the "you're pretty good for a girl" attitude as a young child, has proven her validity as a musician through her talent and drive to play bluegrass. Tammy's activities fall into both the communal and individual realms of performance. Displaying the talent for virtuosic performance on fiddle, and fulfilling a historically more "masculine" role as a soloist, Tammy partakes in the individual or performative realm in bluegrass. But she also participates in the communal realm as she negotiates the role of vocalist and sings harmony within the group.

While contemporary American society prides itself on equal opportunity, underlying gender biases still exists. Female bluegrass musicians have greatly contributed to the genre as both vocalists and instrumentalists and deserve equal recognition. Even though men have not fully accepted women, female musicians continually achieve success as they have taken control of their own careers.

Even as bluegrass has progressed beyond traditional limitations, my informants express that gender bias still occurs. Because bluegrass music was born of and perpetuates masculine ideals, a permanent removal of gender bias appears improbable. When her audiences automatically identify her as the vocalist or as a groupie, Jessica finds that even as a young member within the bluegrass genre, she encounters gender bias on the part of many audience members. She constantly has to correct and educate her public, both about her own role and about women's bluegrass roles in general.

As a both an academic and a performing bluegrass musician, I have found that my research of bluegrass music from a gendered perspective has furthered my understanding of the roles I fulfill and where I fit within the genre as a woman. I now realize more fully why my bluegrass instructors (who have been male musicians) so strongly directed me toward the ability to perform virtuosically, especially when it came to solos. I also recognize the supreme importance that bluegrass places on playing an instrument; for me, this places into new context my recollections of my instructors who required women singers in our ensemble to pick up an instrument too, especially the bass.

The instrumental talent and emphasis on individual virtuosity pioneered by bluegrass founders like Bill Monroe continues to exert great cultural capital today. Although instrumentalists branch out and incorporate new sounds into their music, holding virtuosic and soloistic talent will always exist as a core value within bluegrass music. The above epigraph, from Mountain Hearts' website, displays this well, again emphasizing virtuosity within the bluegrass genre. Therefore, the place of women in bluegrass music remains a constant negotiation, as today's performers still find the legacy of the past very present in bluegrass culture.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1.1: Tammy Rogers on the fiddle (Jenna Lawson, 2009).

Figure 2.1: Tammy Rogers singing harmony with the Steeldrivers (Jenna Lawson, 2009).

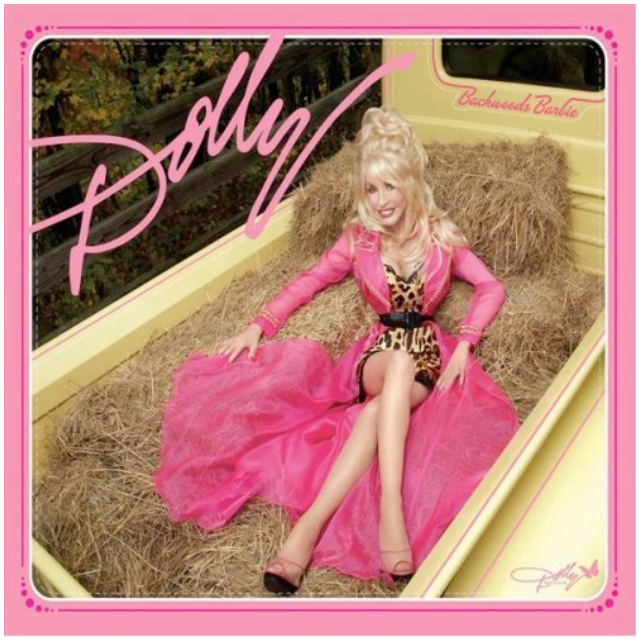

Figure 3.1: Dolly Parton, *Dolly.* (Picture from www.amazon.com).

Figure 4.1: Rhonda Vincent, *Taken* (Picture from www.amazon.com).

Figure 5.1-5.5: The Steeldrivers biography pictures (Photographs from www.steeldrivers.net).

VITA

Jenna Lawson graduated from Denison University, Granville OH, with a B.A. in Music in 2007. There she developed an interest in bluegrass and performed with Denison University's bluegrass ensemble for three and a half years. Through her participation with the ensemble, she had an opportunity to open for the well known bluegrass band *Cherryholmes* at the Midland Theatre in Newark, OH. In addition, she performed in the Denison University Orchestra and Gamelan Ensemble.

Drawing on her interests in music and culture, Jenna received the M.M. from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 2011. During her time at University of Tennessee, she also participated in the University Orchestra, and served as a Musicology Grader.

Jenna continues to perform as a classical violinist and bluegrass fiddler. Jenna currently resides in Parker, CO. Her plans for the future include teaching music and violin lessons to those eager to learn.