

Name: Christina Lynn

Affiliation: Dundalk Institute of Technology,

Dundalk, Co. Louth, Ireland.

Biography

Christina Lynn is a musician and PhD candidate originally from Crossmolina Co. Mayo, Ireland. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Ethnomusicology at Dundalk Institute of Technology under the supervision of Dr. Helen Lawlor and Dr. Daithí Kearney. Christina's doctoral research is an investigation in the lives of three key female performers in Irish country music – Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann. This research project is the first of its kind in the Irish context. It will examine the longevity of the careers of these three female figures, through critical biographies and explore how they have impacted the genre as it is performed and perceived today. Christina holds a B.A Hons in Applied Music from Dundalk Institute of Technology, and a Masters in Musicology from University College Dublin. Christina is currently a member of ICTM Ireland where she is co-editor of the annual newsletter *Spéis*.

“Classifying Operations”: Constructing and manufacturing identities in Irish and American country music

A musician's image is critical to their success (Whitely, 1997, 2013; North and Hargreaves, 1999; Machin, 2010). As well as the sound of the music, it creates a connection with their audience, particularly since the advent of MTV and the music video (Banks, 1997; Frith, Goodwin and Grossberg, 2005; Lieb, 2013). Irish and American performers of country music utilise elements of social and cultural markers to create an identity for themselves. Influenced by the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990) and its application in the study of country music (Hubbs, 2014), I will provide a comparison between American country singer Gretchen Wilson and Irish country singer Mags McCarthy.

There are many aspects of identity that are critical to understanding how the construction of an image or persona impacts on how a musician is recognised or received. Nadine Hubbs (2014) provided a comprehensive discussion on the impact of class, race and homosexuality in country music in America. She focused on Gretchen Wilson portrayal of the ‘redneck’ women as a contrast to the negative narrative surrounding this term.¹ Hubbs suggests that Wilson utilises her identity as a ‘redneck’ to instil a confidence and a unity in her music and in her audience. Here I bring Hubbs concept further and critically examine two music videos to illustrate ways that both Wilson and McCarthy reflect Bourdieu's scenario of “classifying operations” (Hubbs 2014, 118). I will then demonstrate how both of these women are exemplifying a specific cultural identity. I will first detail elements of the theories put forward by Bourdieu (1990), Hubbs (2014) and musicologist Philip Austlander (2004) that have aided in the development

¹*Rednecks, Queers and Country Music* was released by Hubbs in 2014. Of particular interest is her discussion in chapter three, where she focuses on the social narratives created by middle and upper classes. These are what Hubbs suggests, to be the focal points in the creation of a class divide. Those that do not fit inside of the social and cultural markers are said to be lower class, uneducated, redneck, homophobic, prejudiced, racist and so forth (pp 107-130)

of this paper, in which I present a new approach in analysing identity presentations and embodiments.

The performance of identity draws significantly from the social contexts from which performers emerge and with which they seek to engage. Focusing largely on education, Bourdieu (1990) engages with the concept of social classification and the choices made by culture within which individuals participate. Of particular interest is his concept of the selection of meanings:

which objectively define a group's or a class's culture as a symbolic system is socio-logically necessary insofar as that culture owes its existence to the social conditions of which it is the product and its intelligibility to the coherence and functions of the structure of the signifying relations which constitute it' (Bourdieu 1990, p. 8).

Bourdieu goes further to detail what he means by this in his glossary. He states that the:

Choice which constitutes a culture (choices' which no one makes) appear as arbitrary when related by the comparative method to the sum total of present and past cultures or, by imaginary variations, to the universe of possible cultures, they reveal their necessity as soon as they are related to the social conditions of their emergence and perpetuation (ibid).

The 'symbolic system[s]' that Bourdieu is discussing are the cultural symbols that exist within any given culture. These symbols are 'necessary' as markers for those within a cultural system and those outside of it. This allows for distinctions to be made between one culture and another. The choice is then instituted within that culture and is a highly charged symbolic representation of that culture. Both the symbolic system and the choice are seen as classifying operations within any given culture. While Bourdieu's concepts are taken from an examination and

analysis of educational systems and their impact on the wider society, these concepts can be applied to society and culture as a whole.

Hubbs (2014) applies Bourdieu's theory to American country music. She states that 'Bourdieu's writing on class cultures illumine the cultural logic at work in so-called poverty pride songs – and indeed, in the mechanisms of working-class formation' (Hubbs 2014, p. 117). Furthermore, Hubbs highlights a deeper understanding of Bourdieu's theory when she discusses how the "object" of sociology's classifications produces her own "classifying operations" and articulates a polemical view of the other class' (ibid, p. 118). She provides an in-depth analysis of how the aspects of cultural classification are prevalent in country music songs and identity markers, stating:

In the context of radically separate social and cultural spheres, country music's working-class reputation and focus often inspire alienation and revulsion in middle-class audiences. But the working class has its own views and values, separate from and unrecognised by the middle-class system of values and symbolic exchange, and (as Bourdieu demonstrates) dominated by it' (Hubbs 2014, p.118).

Further to this Hubbs outlines how research by Lamont (2000) and Fox (2004) on working class values and authenticity adds to classifying operations.

Hubbs' approach is complemented by Auslander's (2004) trichotomy of performance analysis, which draws significantly on the work of musicologist Simon Frith (1998). Auslander suggests that there are three layers contained in any performance: 'the real person (the performer as a human being), the performance persona (which corresponds to Frith's (1998) star personality or image) and the characters (Frith's song personality)' (2004, p.6). Auslander's trichotomy allows researchers and audiences to analyse the embodied identities of performers through performances, both live and recorded. Auslander suggests that performances 'take place within contexts of the socio-cultural conventions of the societies in which they occur, conventions

that popular music both reflects and contests' (p. 10). The idea that performances take place within the context of socio-cultural conventions also adds to the concept put forward by Hubbs and indeed Bourdieu. Auslander is specifically speaking of the performance context, yet his clear distinction of three 'personas' is useful in analysing the images presented by artists in their music videos.

The concept of the 'sincerity contract' (Rogers, 1989) can be considered alongside Auslander's approach. Rogers states that there are channels of communication between a Country music artist and an audience. While Country music, like most popular music, is a medium of mass media it is also enjoyed in a private or semi-private way. This then enables the performer – the person with a message to tell according to Rogers – to create the idea of sincerity through their voice and use of language.

Rhetoric on the term 'Redneck'

In discussing the concept of the Redneck Women, Hubbs (2014) presented an analysis of Wilson's songs and image as an example of how she exemplifies the 'Redneck' women and thus cultivates an audience whom identify with the same cultural and social markers. Hubbs makes it clear that this concept of 'Redneck' is not something that she has created however, but something that can be traced back in American history that has been associated with lower-middle class or working-class people. 'Redneck' and Country music have had a long association, actually having first been associated with the 'hillbilly' music of the 1920s. American Country music is prominently and proudly associated with specific regions or places (Hubbs 2014, p. 11). Many suggest that country music comes from the south, yet there is a counter claim and research to support country music's association with California, the Southwest and the Midwest (Carney, G. O, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1994). Furthermore, Hubbs states that:

Reception research shows that commercial country was initially a music of rural more than southern audiences; that by the 1970s its audiences were not distinctly rural or regional but preponderantly midlife, working – and lower-middle-class whites; and that in the 1980s and 1990s country made significant inroads in suburbia. Other indicators suggests that in some regions of the United States country music is less a distinct cultural object than something woven through the fabric of everyday life. (Hubbs 2014, p. 11).

Within these regions and places, the popularity of country music with audiences is most notably associated with ‘objects of sociologies classification’ such as working-class, predominantly white, provincial and often southern people (Hubbs 2014, Jensen 2008, A. Fox 2004, P. Fox 2009).

The relationship between country music performers/songwriters and their audience is critical. Bill C. Malone in his description of country music suggests that songwriters ‘have been part of the audience for whom they write’ (2010, p. 348).² Malone further suggests that the song lyrics are ‘realistic in that they concern themselves with the petty details of human existence ... [and] describe life as it is, not as one might wish it to be’ (ibid). The combination of descriptions put forward by Hubbs (2004) and Malone (2010) suggest that country music is music of a specific type of performer and audience. Country music’s content and context are projected towards the above-mentioned subsets of societies: the music is telling a specifically relatable story to its listeners. These subsets of societies are often classed as lower or working-class, white, heterosexual and rural, and most notably associated with the term ‘Redneck’.

‘Redneck’ like ‘Hillbilly’ were initially terms used by other classes as a form of exclusion. In fact, the term ‘Redneck’ according to the Cambridge dictionary refers to a ‘poor, white person without education, especially one living in the countryside in the southern US,

² This belonging to the community to whom you sing is also evident in the Dolly Parton Documentary *Here I Am* (2019) which is available on Netflix, youtube.com and BBC.

who is believed to have prejudiced (unfair and unreasonable) ideas and beliefs. The word is usually considered offensive' (www.cambridgeuniversitypress.com 2021). 'Redneck' according to Hubbs, is a 'pejorative term referring to white, working-class, provincial, often boorish, sometimes (but not always) southern male' (Hubbs 2014, p. 14).

Rhetoric on the term 'culchie'

Similar to the context in the use of the term 'redneck', the term 'culchie' hasn't always been used as a term of endearment or praise. Linguistic scholar Helen Kelly-Holmes (2019) suggests 'in very broad terms a culchie is an Irish person who is not from Dublin' (Kelly-Holmes, 2019, p. 353). She goes further to state that there are contrasting accounts for the use of the term culchie:

One is that the term 'culchie' refers to a native of Kiltimagh in rural Co. Mayo on the west coast of Ireland on the very opposite side of the country to Dublin. An alternative theory is that the word derives from 'agriculture', and so it was originally used to refer to someone who works in agriculture, since this rural, farming lifestyle is seen as a key feature of a 'culchie'. Many words in Irish English come from contact with the Irish language and two other theories on the origin of 'culchie' relate to this possible etymology. Both are based on the homophonic closeness of the term to two Irish language words in particular. One is 'coillte' meaning woods, the suggestion being that this was a term for people from the woods; the other is 'cúl an tí', which means 'back of the house'. So, in other words, it was a term used to refer to servants in the big houses of landed estates of the Anglo-Irish (Kelly-Holmes, 2019, p. 353)

No matter what the origin of the term, the obvious association of the term is with people who live away from urban life in Ireland. Sociologists Anne Cassidy and Brian McGrath have suggested that

Culchie' is usually used as a pejorative label and stereotype by Irish urban dwellers to describe rural individuals and has derogatory connotations of being backward, old

fashioned and dim-witted. While the term ‘culchie’ is often used by outsiders in a sneering manner, in employing the word ‘culchie’ to describe themselves the word was positively appropriated by participants, signalling defiant pride in belonging to and membership of this community (Cassidy & McGrath, 2015, p. 26).

Only in the most recent past have Irish rural residents reclaimed this term and utilised it as a positive identity marker. The positive use of this term can also be assessed in its use by Irish expatriates in their affirmation of who they are and where they come from.³ Furthermore ‘Culchie’ is often associated with those in Ireland who listen to, participate in and perform country music. While there is a large percentage of rural Ireland who enjoy country music, not all residents of rural Ireland would claim to be country music fans. Furthermore, not all fans of Country music are resident in rural Ireland.⁴ However, those who do participate in this music have also taken the term ‘culchie’ and utilised it as a positive marker in the expression of identity. Many Irish country music artists have included the term in their songs as a form of inclusion, solidarity and a sense of pride.

Gretchen Wilson, An American Redneck Woman

Born in Pocahontas IL, American country music singer Gretchen Wilson (b.1973) is best known for her 2004 break through hit ‘Redneck Woman. Nadine Hubbs (2014) suggests that:

since the 1970s [redneck] has been reclaimed as a defiant antibourgeois self-designation – signalling, among other things, a rejection of the euphemistic rhetoric of the middle class (if euphemism is “the neutralization and distancing which bourgeois discourse about the social world requires and performs” it is also a frequent object of working-class perceptions of middle-class hypocrisy, duplicity, and condescension) (Hubbs 2014, p.14)

³ See Cassidy and McGrath (2015) *Farm, place and identity construction among Irish farm youth who migrate* for further reading on this topic.

⁴ See John Millar’s research on country music in Dublin, Ireland.

It is reinterpretation and new understanding of the term 'Redneck' that Hubbs discusses in her analysis of Wilson. She sees Wilson as using 'Redneck' in her song titles as a sense of pride and self-identification 'to create a statement of cross-gender working-class consciousness and solidarity' (ibid). In essence Hubbs suggests that Wilson is calling to arms her fellow 'rednecks' in pride songs. This specific song details a pride about who they [Rednecks] are and how they live. Wilson does this by invoking cultural markers that identify her as a 'redneck'. The cultural knowledge Wilson has of what a 'redneck' is and does, is evident in her portrayal of a 'redneck' in this music video. This specific cultural capital allows Wilson to be seen as authentic. Rogers' concept of 'the sincerity contract' is evident here, whereby 'The "sincerity contract" in country music [is] the expectation of rapport between a credible, straightforward artist and her or his audience' (1989, p. 17). Rogers' first chapter provides pivotal background reading into the creation of commercial country music, while also detailing the pitfalls for those who 'have a dream of making it big but fail' (1989, p 6). He details the 'sincerity contract' through his theory on how artists communicate with the audience through their songs and use of language (Rogers 1989). Rogers suggests that this sincerity between an artist and the audience is a vital pillar of a country music star. This allows them to create a fan base that trust in the 'message' the singer is spreading (Rogers 1989, p. 5). Richard A. Peterson (2002) has also discussed this idea of authenticity where he discusses the idea of fabricating authenticity in country music. Peterson and Rogers are discussing authenticity in different ways; Rogers discusses the concept of the 'straightforward' artist, whereas Peterson is concerned with the construct of an identity that is not necessarily the same as the lived experience of the artist but relates to their artform or cultural narrative. Hubbs suggests that since emerging on the country music scene in 2004, Wilson has 'cultivated an image as a *real* redneck woman along the lines sketched in her songs' (Hubbs 2014, p. 119). It is this idea of the *real* that enable Wilson to

display Rogers concept of the sincerity contract. It also illuminates Petersons theory of authenticity in the country music artist.

Reflective of a particular identity within American society, Wilson was brought up in a trailer park and left school at the age of 14 (Wilson, 2006). She worked as a cook and a bar tender until 1996 when she left her hometown to pursue a career as a country music artist in Nashville. In the music video 'Redneck Woman', Wilson is seen 'muddin' on an ATV and in a truck. This is a complete contrast to the majority of music videos in 2004 from female artists. In her autobiography Wilson details watching the 'singer-supermodels' of country music 'Shania Twain, Faith Hill and Martina McBride' while writing 'Redneck woman'. She states that she remembers exactly what she was wearing at the time: 'a wife-beater tank top, a pair of sweatpants, and flip-flops. I had no makeup on, and I had a cigarette in one hand and a bottle of beer in another' (Wilson 2006, p. 140). Wilson turned to her writing partner at the time and said 'there just no way that I can do that. No way in hell' (ibid). He was stunned and asked, 'do what' (ibid). Wilson pointed at the music videos and said she would never be able to record a music video like that: 'That. I can't do that. That's not who I am'. (ibid). Wilson is placing herself in the context of a rural, country potentially farming female who is accustomed to using an ATV and driving a truck on this terrain on a regular basis. It also alludes to the entertainment activities that these rural dwellers participate in. Wilson appears comfortable in her presentations on both the ATV and driving the Truck. She is not afraid of 'getting dirty' or appearing in a 'non-glamours way'. Wilson is portraying herself as the down to earth, home grown, *real* 'Redneck'. In her autobiography, also entitled *Redneck Woman*, she states:

"Redneck" in "Redneck Woman" is a lifestyle, an attitude toward the world. It's about people who work hard, often in blue-collar jobs, and play hard. And they don't take no crap from anyone about who they are and where they come from (Wilson 2006, p. 141).



Re-enforcing the concept of the lifestyle of a ‘redneck woman’, Wilson returns ‘home’ in her now dirty truck to a trailer park. As evident from her biography, the audience are already aware of her own personal experience having grown up in a trailer park therefore this imagery allows the viewer once again to visualise the ‘sincerity contract’ in action. Wilson transfers this authenticity and sincerity to the stage when she is seen in her performance imagery. She is singing and playing guitar in a honky-tonk or a dimly lit bar. This alludes to a local, hometown performance in this context. The venue is not showcased as being a large venue with an audience base of thousands. Instead, we are drawn to a more intimate setting where the audience are in close proximity to the stage. As the music video focuses on Wilson in this performance her fashion presentation does evolve into a glamorous music star. Wilson is not wearing clothing to make her stand out from the crowd. The ‘difference’ between her and her audience is their positioning, Wilson is on stage while the audience are on the ground.⁵ These

⁵ An audience with a gender balance, however, we are aware that the song itself is targeting the female audience members to celebrate their identity as ‘redneck women’. Yet the song is also engaging the male members of the audience (in the video at least).

images along with the words in her song enable Wilson to be identified as a ‘redneck woman’ by her fellow ‘redneck audience’.

Engaging Auslander’s theory here, he has suggested there are three personas at play in any given performance. In this instance Wilson is portraying the real person, the performance persona and the character. Yet, to the audience she is only displaying the real person. The performer is displaying what she thinks the audience wants to see. Wilson has modelled herself on the ‘Redneck’ persona, therefore her audience will only see the ‘Redneck’ as the person. The audience does not see Wilson’s performance as a performance but as a portrayal of the ‘straightforward’ artist (Rogers 1989).

I was discovering something much more important [during the song writing process]—what really makes a singer-songwriter connect to his or her fans and build a career on a solid foundation and not just on hype, musical fads, or the right image for the moment. That’s at the heart of country music—connecting with your audience on some level of real-life experience. The more of yourself you put in the music—warts and all—the greater the chance that the audience will take that music into their own hearts (Wilson 2006, p. 141)

Yet, the performance can be analysed from all three perspectives. The performance persona and the character are also evident here. Wilson is engaging a forceful embodiment of the ‘redneck’ here. Every aspect of the video and the song allows the audience to see Wilson perform the ‘redneck’ identity.⁶ This is also evident in the character of the song. The character is the ‘redneck woman’ whom Wilson is singing about. While this may not be entirely the lifestyle that Wilson has lived, the character is highlighting these aspects to engage with a wider audience demographic. Therefore, the character, the persona and the real person all merge into

⁶ The forceful embodiment of the ‘redneck’ ideology engages almost all character traits that are generally accompanied when referencing ‘redneck culture’. That does not mean that Wilson has actually experienced all these in her personal life, however, her cultural knowledge and confident portrayal allows the *performance persona* and the *character* to become seen as a *real person* embodied identity (Auslander 2004)

the one embodied positive identity that Wilson has displayed. The use of the sincerity contract as Rogers has suggested combined with Austlander's analysis model is what has enabled Wilson to produce this image and audience based. Wilson has used 'classifying object' to create a unique artistic identity for herself.

Mags McCarthy, An Irish Country Girl

From a farming background in Ireland, Mags McCarthy provides a contrasting Irish country music artist. McCarthy was born and raised in Co. Cork, Ireland and completed a university degree in music before deciding to pursue a career as a performer both in Ireland and abroad. Initially engaged primarily in Irish traditional music, song and dance, McCarthy has been part of many touring Irish dance troupes including 'Rhythm of the Dance'. She moved to Nashville in 2017 to focus primarily on her country music career. Since moving to America, McCarthy has invited to performed on a number of renowned country music stages in Nashville and has received critical acclaim for a number of her singles released in America.⁷ McCarthy has carved out a unique space for herself in the Nashville scene as both a singer and as a musician. Moving back to Ireland during the Covid-19 Pandemic has provided McCarthy with the opportunity to promote herself and her music more readily to the Irish audiences through social media and television interviews.

It is through social media research that McCarthy music video first came to my attention. The music video for McCarthy's cover of Dolly Parton's song 'Light of a clear blue morning' is what will be contrasted here. In this music video for McCarthy utilised her Irish identity markers to showcase her Irishness to the audience. In a recent interview with McCarthy suggests that she sought to evoke Ireland and an Irish sound at the start using uilleann pipes over images of Ireland. She states this:

⁷ See McCarthy's webpage for detailed accounts of her residencies including the 'Hard Rock Café', Nashville and '12th & Porter', Nashville. See also Music Row Magazine for critically reviews of her single releases 2018-2020.

shows my identity and my brand and my image and who I am. I don't ever forget who I am, even when I'm in an interview in America I'll always think about how I was brought up, who I met, who had helped me, where I'm from, most of my interviews people are probably thinking where is this dripsy place, but I love home, I love friends, I love where I come from and I love the Irish people (McCarthy 2021, Interview)

These sentiments put forward by McCarthy in her own words are illustrating her 'straightforward' and 'credible' nature that was incited by Rogers in his concept of the 'sincerity contract' (Rogers 1989) but also reflect her awareness of how instrumentation and the use of particular images can help construct and communicate an identity. McCarthy is highlighting her Irish identity through the use of music and Irish coastline imagery before she sings a single note. The first time McCarthy appears on scene to the viewer she is walking to the fields of green where the cattle are grazing, which is swiftly followed by her herding the cattle towards the farmyard.



As the music video moves through to the second verse McCarthy's image changes. In her own words, McCarthy suggested that the second half of the video highlights her passion and love for her music career: 'It shows me finishing my chores and then going out to play music for the night' (McCarthy 2021, interview). McCarthy first is seen dressed in white dancing and singing along the coastline of Cork. McCarthy is wearing a white dress that hints at a purity and innocence, yet set against the rugged coastline contrast this meaning with a wildness: a wildness in a young Irish female.

The image changes again in the closing of the video where McCarthy is standing in the middle of a carnival setting or funfair setting, with carnival cars driving around her. The spotlight focuses on McCarthy and she has again changed her outfit. This is McCarthy the performer at night, in contrast to the farming working girl during the day. This image also poses another meaning. It alludes to the heritage of Irish country music performers, such as Big Tom, Declan Nerney, Philomena Begley and Susan McCann who were themselves farmworkers who also performed at Carnivals and Marquees before the eventual take-over of the dancehall and function rooms.⁸

McCarthy suggested that the concept for this part of the music video was to show the viewer who she really was. To show what it is like: 'a day in the life of Mags' (McCarthy 2021, interview). McCarthy is helping out on the farm, doing her chores before we she her change her clothing and appear on a beach and even later in a carnival stage. McCarthy is a rural Irish girl but, in contrast with older representations of rural Ireland, she is also mobile, educated and confident and lives in the modern world. Writing about the 'Irishness' of Irish music, John O'Flynn has pointed out, 'dominant representation of 'authentic' Irish culture attempt to reinstate aspects of essential Irishness – whether real, imaginary or a combination of both - into more recently formulated projections of a cosmopolitan and progressive Ireland' (2016, p.

⁸ See 'a Happy Type of Sadness' 2018, to provide further context.

197). In the opening of this video, McCarthy is utilising her ‘classifying operations’ to reinstate ‘essential’ identity markers of Irishness but relates this to her experience of living in contemporary Ireland. McCarthy is engaging in a trope of the rural Irish farming female to engage her ‘sincerity contract’ so that she may be seen as an authentic, straightforward, credible artists who lives what she sings. She uses the rural farming trope as a form of representation of all Irish females even though this trope is only representative of a small fraction of the population in Ireland.⁹

McCarthy’s use of costume change and cultural display show a vast knowledge of the world that she inhabits. Similar to Wilson, she employs the sincerity contract, showcasing who she is as a person and revealing her autobiography through her music and accompanying videos. McCarthy has utilised her specific ‘classifying operations’ as a way of representing a specific type of Irishness that does not focus on cosmopolitanism and progressive images. Instead, McCarthy utilises rugged imagery of Irish coastlines, alongside the use of her own family farm to highlight an embodied portrayal of her own identity.

While based in Ireland from 2020, McCarthy has brought her American audience on her journey with her. She has utilised identity markers to show her American audience of her own roots as a rural individual. She is identifying the elements of her own unique identity while also identifying with the audience to who she sings both in Ireland and in America. McCarthy is clearly very keenly aware of her own classifying operations. McCarthy is from rural Ireland where farming is a way of life. She makes this the most prominent element of her video. McCarthy is proud of her rural Irish upbringing and its prominence shows her affinity to her heritage. Unlike Wilson however, McCarthy also incorporates her more mature and contemporary femininity into her video, thus allowing for a wider audience engagement.

⁹ According to the Central Statistic office Ireland, in the 2016 census women represented only 10.8% of the work force in agriculture, forestry and fishery.

As with Wilson, Auslander's trichotomy is evident here. The real person and the performance persona are one and the same here. McCarthy is trying to portray the real person, yet that person is also a character in this song. The character is evident in the video in fleeting glimpses. The reason for this is that the character of the song lyrics do not physically relate to the music video however, McCarthy bring elements of the lyrics into her portrayal. All three merge into one as the video comes to an end thus leaving the viewer wondering which version of these images is the real Mags McCarthy.

Closing remarks

The use of cultural rhetoric – classifying operations - has enabled both Wilson and McCarthy to portray their own identities. Wilson from Pocahontas, Illinois has captured the essence of the 'redneck' women in both her lyrics and her image portrayal. Her cultural knowledge of the 'redneck' lifestyle has allowed her to portray this identity in her music. She has spoken of her aspiration to stay 'true to herself' and not 'selling out' to the 'singer-supermodel' persona's already on display in the American country music circuit. McCarthy has also taken her life experience and portrayed an altered presentation her own identity. McCarthy has presented a particular aspect of the rural Irish experience. The essence of her identity is showcased in her display of her day-to-day life in Ireland. Furthermore, by engaging with the concept of the 'sincerity contract' by displaying their 'private lives' both women are viewed as 'straightforward' and 'credible'. They have taken cultural rhetoric, often used in a negative way, and portrayed positive images. By taking this rhetoric and engaging with the 'sincerity contract', both women have utilised 'classifying operations' in a positive way to create and display a specific personally relevant identity.

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