POPPIN' THEIR THANG: AFRICAN AMERICAN BLUESWOMEN AND MULTIPLE JEOPARDY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Delane E. Wright, B.A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1997
POPPIN' THEIR THANG: AFRICAN AMERICAN BLUESWOMEN AND MULTIPLE JEOPARDY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Delane E. Wright, B.A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1997

This ethnographic analysis examines the life stories and lyrics of four African American blues singers. Specifically, it compares the cultural themes that emerge from their life stories to the cultural themes that emerge from their commercially released music. The findings suggest that the singers recognize, to varying degrees, the impact of racism, sexism, and classism on their personal lives and careers. These same themes, however, are not present in the lyrics of the music that they choose to sing. Both the life stories and the lyrics reveal internal inconsistencies that mirror one another. The conclusion suggests that the inconsistencies within their stories and music are consistent with their liminal position with regard to dominant and subordinate cultures.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No study of this size is ever the work of one person. I would like to thank my advisor, Jay Allison, for making my educational endeavors, in general, and this study, in particular, personally enriching experiences. His unending support as a mentor, his patience as a teacher, and his encouragement as a friend have proved invaluable to me.

I also would like to thank Carol Cawyer, who served as an excellent guide for me in the unchartered territory of qualitative methodology. David Hartman provided an invaluable external perspective that added to the depth of this study. In addition, the faculty in the communication studies department provided me with numerous opportunities to rehearse the ideas articulated here in a variety of classes.

I have had the good fortune to complete this project in a supportive environment, surrounded by friends. Shannon Davis, Debra Burkett, and Maria Simone gave their encouragement, time, and energy to help make this project reach completion. Todd Bashor, computer genius extrodinaire, melded the many parts into a final document acceptable to the graduate reader.

In addition to the teachers named above, I would like to thank Tina Forehand McKay and Sharon Mayor, who taught me the importance of teaching oneself. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my first teachers. My parents, all of them, taught me by way of encouragement and example the many important life-lessons that cannot be learned in the classroom.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................................. iii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .................................................................................... 1

   Review of Literature
      Multiple Jeopardy and African American Feminist Criticism
      Scholes and Textual Criticism
      Interethnic and African American Communication
   Significance of the Study
   Scope of the Study
   Organization

II. METHODS AND PROCEDURES ..................................................................................... 19

   Subjects
   Procedures
      Interviews and Biographies
      Lyrics
      Direct Observation

III. RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS AND BIOGRAPHIES .................................................... 32

   Themes
      Background
      Identity
      Meaning of the Blues
      Creation of Songs
      Performance Issues
      Racism
      Sexism
      Classism
      Audience
      Validation as Artists
   Summary
IV. RESULTS OF LYRICS ........................................................................................................ 74

Lashunia Baker
Sure Shot
Lady Luscious
The Gates City Blueswomen
Bessie Marshall
Summary

V. DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................... 108

Multiple Jeopardy in the Life Stories of Bluesqueens
Racism
Sexism
Classism
Themes from the Blueswomen's Life Stories as Reflected in Their Lyrics
The Gates City Blueswomen
Implications for Multiple Jeopardy
Bessie Marshall
Implications for Multiple Jeopardy
Implications for Further Research

APPENDIX A .................................................................................................................... 134

APPENDIX B .................................................................................................................... 136

APPENDIX C .................................................................................................................... 140

WORKS CONSULTED ..................................................................................................... 143
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In 1972, activist Frances Beale coined the term “double jeopardy” to define the African American female's position in American society. She wrote, “As blacks, they suffer all the burdens of prejudice and mistreatment that fall on anyone with dark skin. As women they bear the additional burden of having to cope with white and black men” (King 46). Sociological scholarship evolved to claim that economic class constitutes a third jeopardy (King 46). As King suggests, a more realistic model is one that encompasses the relationships between all three, which translates into the equation “racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism” (47). This model maintains that the three oppressions are dialectical rather than unidimensional and “the relative significance of race, sex or class in determining the conditions of black women's lives is neither fixed nor absolute, but rather, is dependent on the sociohistorical context and social phenomenon under consideration” (King 49). Relationships among these oppressive forces have placed the African American female, historically and currently, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, thereby marginalizing and silencing her experience. From the beginnings of slavery to her current role as poor laborer and single-parent, the black female has suffered the injustices of racism, sexism, and classism and the impact of the interrelationship of the three (Davis; Smith and Smith; King)
In spite of her position as a citizen of low status, the African American woman has discovered contexts and mediums through which to voice her frustration and to confront oppression. The blues genre provides an important artistic medium for the black woman, as it allows her to acknowledge the social conditions in which she finds herself and to critique the codes that exist therein. Blues singing and songwriting often place the artist in the role of storyteller and reporter of her experience—an existence in an oppressed community defined by the rules of the dominant culture. The blues provides her with a means to create texts that speak on behalf of the black community in opposition to specific oppressive cultural codes by which she is expected to abide. She can create lyrics and give performances that “talk back” to the unjust structure of American society.

Many scholars have claimed that blues music offers a means of survival and catharsis for blueswomen who exist in a system operating on racist, sexist, and classist values (Harrison; Garon; Carby). Blues lyrics frequently contain themes that criticize and devalue multiple jeopardy. African American women assert autonomy as they sing of leaving old lives behind (e.g., moving to the city), letting go of abusive lovers, and discovering their sexuality and individuality (Harrison). Blueswomen historically created and currently compose and sing songs that reject the place that has been constructed for them in the social hierarchy. They expose the ills of society by simply recounting events and experiences from their lives. They are engaged in the process of telling everyday experience, communicating the otherwise-silenced utterances of a multiply oppressed population.
This study occurred as a response to Kathleen Daly's challenge to researchers and individuals to cease "thinking, imagining, and speaking as if whiteness defines the world" (59). Consequently, informed by African American feminist thought and blues research, this study attempts to determine whether a relationship exists between the life experiences of female, African American blues singers and the music they choose to perform. It recognizes performance as a communicative outlet to achieve this purpose. The study initially seeks to determine whether themes of multiple jeopardy emerge when African American blues singers talk about their lives and their careers as performers in a Texas city referred to in this study as Gates City. As a second step, the study examines the lyrics of the blues songs they choose to perform for themes consistent with their performers' life stories. Comparing themes from the life stories with the themes for the lyrics of the song texts they perform provides a practical means of determining a support for the idea that artistic texts provide a powerful means for critiquing cultural formations. To these ends, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ 1: Do multiple jeopardy issues (racism, sexism, classism) emerge in African American blueswomen's talk about their lives and singing careers?

RQ 2: In what ways do the themes that emerge in the life stories of African American blueswomen compare to the themes in the lyrics of their recorded, commercially available music?
Review of Literature

Existing research in four broad areas is essential for creating a theoretical foundation for this study. First, an historical overview of blues music with a focus on female artists provides a background for the study. Second, concepts from black feminist criticism provide a theoretical foundation for the study. Third, Robert Scholes, a textual and cultural theorist, offers a theoretical construct regarding the relationship between culture, artists, and texts that is relevant to this study. Finally, the contributions of communication research that specifically emphasize interethnic and African American issues inform the intercultural topics addressed in this study.

Blues Music

Two landmark studies have posited that music and communication are unquestionably inseparable. Bruno Nettl, in *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, proposes that "music has much in common with language, and the two are almost inseparable as ingredients of the activity perhaps most centrally observed by ethnomusicologists--singing" (23). His support for this claim comes from previous research in which music was studied as a symbolic language and the two were discovered to be closely tied.

Another landmark work that argues the connection between music and communication is Alan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music*. The crux of Merriam's argument is that understanding both music and communication as a package is necessary, though complicated. He claims, "To view music as a communicative device is clearly one of the purposes of ethnomusicology, though it has been little investigated" (13).
Since music can be understood as a communicative act, it is justified to say that music of a particular community can be conceptualized in terms of sending messages and creating communicative transactions among members of the particular community and between social groups. These two studies are consistent with the symbolic interactionist perspective of human communication, which argues that meanings are social products that are created, calculated, and modified through interactions within and among cultural groups (Blumer; Wood).

The works reviewed in blues scholarship will be divided into two categories for the purpose of this study. First a general history and working knowledge of the blues genre provides a basis for understanding the more specific topic of female blues singing and its significance. Second, a review of the literature regarding female blues singing makes it possible to fully understand the nature of the lyrics.

Blues style music has strong connections with and roots in African Hoodoo and Voodoo religions (Finn; Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom). Existing research suggests that during its development, blues drew heavily upon conditions of slavery for both its form and content. Since African Americans were situated for centuries in the stigmatizing circumstances of slavery, which did not change much after its termination, blues artists composed lyrics that expressed a depressed mental state, a restlessness and discontent with their current life situation, a lack of power to control their future, and a lack of resources to change as a result of societal prejudice (Finn; Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom). Blues developed its form from a number of places, but it must be noted that under
conditions of slavery, African Americans were not allowed to use drums. They did however preserve a very common scale found in traditional African forms known as a pentatonic scale (i.e., its basis is five notes, not eight as it is in traditional western music). Although the blues contains many western characteristics as a result of the influence of Protestant hymns and other songs, it is based on the pentatonic scale (Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom; Finn; Harrison).

Many scholars have attempted to discover the function of the blues. One popular explanation suggests that blues style serves as a source for expressing frustration and experiencing emotional release (Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom; Ottenheimer). Blues is capable of expressing pent-up emotions or moods that cannot be accomplished through speech alone (Ottenheimer). Blues acts as an indicator of wider cultural patterns as it provides commentary from the artists about everyday experience and the themes therein (Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom; Ottenheimer). The blues is confrontational in its constant vocal opposition to the restrictive codes of society.

The literature on female blues performers explains how music provided an outlet through which women could resist cultural structures and forces that denied their experiences and silenced their voices. Lyrics and performances of bluesqueens historically invented new meaning for blues music. Female blues, although quite similar in many respects to male blues, contains content that is specific to the African American woman's life. Her story, often similar to the male performer, was based on a third jeopardy that the black male did not have to face—discrimination based on biological
sex. The meaning of female blues stood apart because women reinterpreted “the black experience form their unique perspective in American society as females” (Harrison 25). Female blues expresses a toughness of will that is grounded in and arises out of blueswomens’ mistreatment (Harrison; Carby; Garon). Marginalized by society on every front, excluded from the women's movement, and denied basic rights as citizens, African American women performed blues to escape confining roles established by a white male hierarchy that they did not choose to be a part of nor help to create. Blueswomen often ignored sexual taboos by breaking the bounds of respectability and conventionality (Carby). They asserted their individuality and independence, and refused to accept the traditional, stable roles offered to them in society by resisting pressure to settle in any one geographical location (Harrison; Garon; Carby; Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom).

The political nature of blues indicates a struggle directed against objectification by the patriarchal system. Historically the bluesqueens' music and performances, as well as the social roles they enacted, announced their refusal to accept further degradation, and demanded the abandonment of the male hierarchy (Garon 104). The research contends that the political function of blues has not changed as time has passed. Blues singers still sing to “get it out” and to acknowledge the unjustifiable actions and values of a prejudiced society (Finn; Harrison; Carby; Ottenheimer).

Multiple Jeopardy and African American Feminist Criticism

The idea of double, triple, and multiple jeopardy grew out of the black feminist movement. These terms attempt to describe the unique status of African American
women as victims confronting more than just sex-related oppression (Davis; King). King proposed the concept of multiple jeopardy to name and acknowledge a relationship between racism, sexism, and classism, and translated them into the equation racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism equals the black woman’s experience in society (47). The necessity of addressing diverse experiences within mainstream feminism (i.e., white, middle-class feminism) presents itself as urgent considering black women have been denied status in the women’s movement (King; Davis; Higginbotham; Brown). A race-sex-class construct provides tools by which to resist subordination on many levels and is capable of threatening a monist philosophy valued not only by societal forces but mainstream feminists as well (King; Urrutia; Daly). Conceiving of womanhood as occurring in a context—one that embodies a full range of experiences—may bring to light forces that shape and determine women’s lives.

Black feminists have committed themselves to interpreting historical events, current circumstances, and artistic texts in light of all three jeopardies in order to fully explicate the condition and plight of African American women within the women’s movement itself. African American women recognize that they are the victims of racist attitudes. Additionally, they have come to realize the shallowness or absence of a commitment by white feminists to address the unique issues arising from the African American woman’s marginalized status (Daly; Davis; Urrutia). King asserts, “conceptually invisible, interpersonally misunderstood and insulted, and strategically
marginalized, black women have found much in the movement has denied important aspects of our history and experience” (60).

Scholes and Textual Criticism

This study attempts to determine whether a relationship exists between the personal narratives that black women tell about their own life experiences as survivors of multiple jeopardy and the lyrics they choose to perform as blues singers. Robert Scholes’ theories of textuality provide a theoretical foundation for this exploration. Two primary ideas that he emphasizes in *Textual Power* are utilized. First, he argues that a specific sociohistorical context and the social codes therein influence and help create the artist as well as the texts that the artist produces. In other words, an artist is a sociohistorical product who creates culture-specific texts that circulate and mean in relation to other contemporary social codes and texts. The artist does not stand outside of time and human experience in a particular community. Rather, the artist marshals particular codes from among those in circulation in the sociohistorical context and uses them in ways that either reify or subvert specific social formations. Second, he posits that critics, in order to more fully understand an artistic text and its values, must learn to interpret texts in light of the social and cultural codes that were operational in the historical periods in which they were created, as well as in light of the contemporary sociohistorical context in which they are presented.

Scholes stresses the influence of the particular social and cultural context on the artist. He argues that “All individuals attain their subjectivity by mastering cultural
codes—and by being mastered in turn by the codes they acquire” (47). Texts, according to Scholes, do not exist outside of human time and are therefore necessarily partial (13). Bluesqueens, having a unique status as a result of multiple jeopardy, are forced to learn multiple codes as well as how to switch freely among them in order to survive. Not only do they have to learn the codes of both the white and black communities, they also have to learn codes appropriate for women and those appropriate for their social class. Because they navigate many social worlds in their everyday lives, they must become adept at negotiating the proper codes and the proper relationship between the codes in any given situation. In their singing, however, the blueswomen may use codes in order to comment on the structure of society and, more specifically, racist, sexist, and/or classist attitudes. Scholes claims that critics can “criticize only as representatives of a group or class. To the extent that individuals are indeed subjects, constituted by transindividual codes, both biological and cultural, the notion of ‘individual subject’ is itself paradoxical” (49). These creative acts of criticism—lyrics—speak on behalf of a group, African Americans, and in many instances, more specifically African American women.

While new texts may provide critiques of what Scholes refers to as “master texts,” those who would offer interpretations of critical texts must learn to read them in light of the cultural codes in circulation and available to the artist. Criticism of artistic texts should be a discipline “deeply dependent upon knowledge. It is not so much a matter of generating meanings out of a text as it is a matter of making connections between a particular verbal text and a larger cultural text . . .” (33). With this knowledge based on
connections, we can get to the ideology that is present in the text (33). Scholes argues that interpreters must be able to interpret codes and decode signs, which ultimately lead to a reconstruction of the particular codes of a text in relation to other codes. The blueswoman utilizes blues to provide a critique of society's injustices, in essence to reject or "turn against" the social codes of the dominant culture. "Criticism, by its very nature, is "'against' other texts insofar as it resists them in the name of the critic's recognition of her or his own values" (Scholes 39). As blues interpreters, given Scholes' model, we can understand the music as critique only if we understand the codes of the dominant culture that they address.

Interethnic and African American Communication

Traditional social science and communication research has emphasized the "white and male" models (Smith; Daly; White and Woodhull-McNeal; Daniel and Smitherman). In the communication discipline, scholars have begun to recognize the importance of providing frameworks by which to assess and understand a diversity of experiences. Communication scholars currently are creating new paradigms that recognize that members of different ethnicities use different interaction strategies, operate from different perspectives, and perceive communication behavior uniquely in light of their own experiences as oppressed minority groups (Daniel and Smitherman; Johnson; Madison). As scholars come to understand the values that inform ethnic communication, they will be better able to understand the circulation of meaning in these communities, and, therefore the intricacies and subtleties of interethnic communication. Rapidly shifting
demographics in the United States increasingly bring people from different ethnic backgrounds into contact with one another. Consequently, it is vital to study interethnic communication (Kim 4).

Different ethnic groups possess varying and unique normative value structures, which make it difficult to compare one culture's communication practices to another's (Adams; Winch and Spainer). Despite the difficulty researchers confront in comparing cultures, certain theories address issues that are relevant in spite of interethnic differences. Uncertainty Reduction Theory, as explained by Berger and Calabrese, focuses on the need to reduce anxiety and uncertainty during communication transactions. This interpersonal theory explains individuals' needs to "increase predictability" about themselves and others during communication (100). Communication researchers note the importance of this strategy when members of different ethnicities interact as a means to achieve more effective communication. (Gudykunst and Kim).

Another pertinent theory that describes the interactions between ethnicities is the Willingness to Communicate theory (McCroskey and Richmond). This theory argues that cultural and personality variables can explain why individuals communicate differently under identical circumstances (72). As researchers engage in more ethnic specific communication, they may begin to understand and explicate the nature of these cultural variables present in interethnic communication.

As we increase our knowledge of the values and cultural practices of particular ethnicities, applying such theories will become an easier task. By recognizing differences
individuals may become more sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences and better conceptualize the meanings and messages of communication. For the purposes of this study, it is important to understand the research that has been conducted about African American communication in particular.

With regard to African American communication, scholars maintain that African Americans still retain some of the qualities of traditional Africa in their communication practices (Daniel and Smitherman; Johnson; Fine). Daniel and Smitherman maintain that the affective process of black communication has “remained essentially African,” in particular the call and response technique predominant in many of the cultural practices of Africa (28). Call and response is defined as “the verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which each of the speaker’s statements (or “calls”) is punctuated by expressions (“responses”) from the listener (28). This technique has been retained in both secular and sacred dimensions of black life (Daniel and Smitherman) and can be recognized in black church services, step shows (Fine), and in blues, gospel, and jazz music (Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom).

Elizabeth Fine recognizes that many African-American folk traditions and communication patterns are evident in the performances of African American fraternity and sorority “step shows,” public events in which members of sororities and fraternities perform dance and rhyme routines in a competitive fashion (40). In analyzing the messages inherent in the cultural practices of “snapping,” Patrick Johnson reflects on how the life experiences and struggles of African Americans inform the African American
expressive traditions. In addition he assigns great importance to nonverbal communication in his study of African American SNAP! Culture (i.e., African American homosexual males who engage in a nonverbal behavior that signifies "talking back" to individuals) because even when used alone "it may communicate what speech can and more" (122).

Finally, Soyini Madison describes the phenomena of "theories of the flesh" and "specialized knowledge" in order to explicate the storytelling practices of people of color, African American women in particular. She recognizes the value in theories of flesh which are the everyday stories and everyday theoretical perspectives held by individuals and presented by scholars (usually in the form of narratives). She claims, however, that scholars are obligated to move toward "specialized knowledge," which requires that the researcher move beyond the role of "translator" to the role of "interpreter" in order to unveil the nature of social and political systems and work toward liberation (215).

As communication scholars explore the intricacies of interethnic communication and more closely examine specific communication practices of ethnic cultures, it will be possible to more fully grasp the complex nature of the exchange of meaning and messages between ethnicities. From this, interpersonal and culture-specific theories may come together to provide new frameworks by which to study and understand these processes.

In summary, this study draws on research from four emphases: blues musicology, African American feminist criticism, Robert Scholes' theories of textuality, and
interethnic and African American communication. Blues research provides historical background and describes the elements and functions of female blues singing vital to this study. African American feminism provides a framework for understanding the social and economic conditions and that inform the experiences of African American women. Robert Scholes' textual theories suggest a method for examining artistic texts in light of cultural codes. Finally, while research in interethnic communication suggests the complexities associated with understanding communication between ethnic cultures, African American communication research offers theories and describes communicative practices specific to African American communities. Together, the four areas of research provide a foundation for examining multiple jeopardy in the life stories and music of contemporary bluesqueens.

Significance of the Study

This study, which is cross-disciplinary in nature, has implications for theory and research in a variety of disciplines. First, it contributes to the body of literature regarding interethnic communication. Communication Studies can extend its understanding of the communicative practices of subordinate cultures by examining the means by which members of those cultures choose to engage and critique the dominant culture. The discipline will be able to better educate students and help them develop and refine their interethnic communication skills. Such skills are gaining importance in a world where a lack of interethnic understanding is manifest as heightened tension between whites and ethnic groups as well as between and among ethnic populations.
Merriam affirms that “there is little doubt that song texts present an extremely fruitful potential for the understanding of deep lying values and sanctions, as well as problems of a given group of people” (180). By exploring the potential relationships between the life experiences of blues singers and the lyrics they sing, some of the complex dialogues that exist between artist and community can be further analyzed. Music, like other forms of communication, may point to social conditions that give rise to it, and therefore, serve as another source for understanding the values and communication practices of a community.

This study also adds to the modest body of feminist literature about multiple jeopardy. Utilizing the racism-sexism-classism model in order to understand creative communication acts extends the possibilities of resources available to feminist critics. Musical texts can provide an additional body of text to serve as the basis for arguments advanced by feminist scholars. Certainly building upon the work of important black feminist scholars such as Frances Beale, Deborah King, and Angela Davis is consequential in interpreting the tripartite plight of the African American female.

Finally, Robert Scholes argues the importance of the artist as sociohistorical product who in turn produces culture specific texts. This study expands the contexts that Scholes discusses by examining the songs of African American blueswomen in light of the stories they tell about their lives.
Scope of the Study

Several delimiting factors exist for the study. First, in order to maintain a clear, purposeful goal in the research, the only genre studied is the blues. The multiple jeopardy model certainly could be applied to other creative forms of communication such as literature or another musical genre. The model might even be used to examine the artifacts that African American women have been compelled to use historically to express their creativity because of their lack of access to culturally sanctioned artforms. Such studies are important and needed, but are beyond the scope of this investigation.

A second delimiting factor relates to the issue of performance. Although a method exists for transcribing the variety of behaviors in a performance event (Fine), this study focuses only on the lyrics of blues songs. While the performance act itself can be an important vehicle for conveying meaning, this study compares the communicative themes that emerge in personal narratives with the communicative themes that occur in song lyrics. The study does not focus on the performative aspects of either of the forms.

Another delimiting factor is the number of interviews conducted. Because the desired data for the study is in the form of narrative accounts, only four interviewees were included in the study. Because of the limited scope of the investigation, the conclusions are not generalizable. They provide a database, however, for an initial comparison of theories of black feminist writers with the textual theories of Scholes.

Another limitation for this study concerns the recency of research about blues music. Although a body of research exists about blues music, it is neither ongoing or
current. New articles revising existing theories and paradigms are not currently being published. Blues research may be forty years old, or even older in some instances. Consequently, the blues foundation for this study will reflect the current state of research in that field.

A final concern for the study is the issue of access to the blues singers. The subjects for the study were willing to be interviewed; however their schedules did not permit them to meet for long periods of time. In addition, they were reluctant to give detailed information or provide in-depth accounts of their experiences, thereby making the data collection process difficult. Follow-up phone interviews were attempted in order to fill in some of the gaps from personal interviews, but interviewees either did not consent to do them due to time and schedule constraints or allowed only a few minutes of their time, providing minimal information.

Organization

The study is divided into five sections. The first chapter serves as a general introduction to the study. The second chapter describes the methodology utilized for this study. Chapter three reports the results of the coding of the interviews conducted for this study. Chapter four reports the results of the coding of the lyrics from the interviewees' published material. The final chapter discusses the implications of the results and draws connections between the life experiences of African American blues singers and the lyrics they choose to perform.
The purpose of this ethnographic study is to determine whether the themes of multiple jeopardy emerge in the life stories of four African American blues singers. In addition, it seeks to discover whether the themes of multiple jeopardy occur in the songs the blueswomen select to perform. Data for this study was obtained from three different sources: personal interviews with bluesqueens, biographies found in the liner notes of *The Gates City Blueswomen* CD (1996), and lyrics from published (i.e., recorded and commercially released) material. This chapter describes the research procedures of the investigation. The first section describes the subjects selected for the study. The second section, which is divided into three subsections, explains the procedures used to compile and analyze the data, including the procedures used to collect, to code, and to analyze the data.

**Subjects**

I selected subjects for the study by reading a local newspaper that lists local, live music performances and by calling music clubs to verify that the performers are local blues singers. The four original women I contacted were used for the study. After
selecting the subjects for the study, I attended performances and sought a personal interview with each subject. There were difficulties in gaining access to the women in that their schedules were busy, and they were hesitant to give much time for interviews. Interviews usually lasted no more than thirty-five minutes. Two subjects were called for phone interviews as a follow up to the personal interview, but they were unwilling to give me more than ten minutes. I conducted the personal interviews at the clubs where the blueswomen perform. The performances occurred in a Texas city that will be referred to in this study as Gates City. I also collected biographies that were included as notes on the Gates City Blueswomen’s commercial CD.

The subjects of the study were provided with informed consent forms (See Appendix A). In order to respect issues of privacy and safety in this study, pseudonyms were created for the interviewees. Of the four bluesqueens interviewed, three (i.e., Sure Shot, Lady Luscious, and Lashunia Baker) frequently work together as The Gates City Blueswomen. The fourth interviewee, Bessie Marshall, works independently in the Gates City area.

The four women interviewed for this study provide a representative sample of local female blues performers. Few female blues performers reside and work in the Gates City, Texas, area. The Gates City Blueswomen all are originally from Gates City. Marshall is from Louisiana, but has been living and performing in Gates City for six years. The women all are middle-aged and two of the four have children. All four
consider themselves professional musicians and place great emphasis on the blues, performance, and spirituality.

The subjects' backgrounds are similar in that all four began singing through their participation in church and gospel choirs. All four interviewees consider gospel to be an important part of their backgrounds and current performance careers. The Gates City Blueswomen continue to sing gospel in churches in Gates City. Marshall performs a gospel show every Sunday morning at the same club at which she performs blues six nights a week.

Although all of the women have achieved a measure of success as performers in the Gates City area, they have only recently risen to the level of notoriety that allows them to publish their work in the form of CDs or audiocassettes. The Gates City Blueswomen released a self-titled CD in 1996. The CD, recorded live at a club in Gates City, contains blues and popular standards, most of which were made popular by famous recording artists. One member of the group, Baker, currently is recording a CD of original material scheduled for release in October 1997. Although Marshall identifies herself as a blues singer, she has released a single audiocassette to date. *Oh Happy Day* (1995) features American gospel music classics. A list of all songs from the women's CD and audiocassette are found in Appendix C.

The members of The Gates City Blueswomen perform for various crowds, ranging from all-black to ethnically diverse. Marshall, on the other hand, performs primarily for white tourists in the bar where she sings six nights a week. The band that
accompanies Marshall is comprised exclusively of white members, while the Gates City Blueswomen perform with an exclusively black group of musicians. Although Marshall’s experiences set her apart from the other three, her presence provides a more holistic picture of the diverse backgrounds from which bluesqueens come.

Procedures

Access to the bluesqueens was gained by attending local blues events and asking for personal interviews. Interviews for both the Gates City Blueswomen and Marshall took place at clubs where they were performing, either before or after performances. All four were willing to be interviewed; however, the Gates City Blueswomen insisted on being interviewed as a group. Although I honored their request, the resulting interview was somewhat less detailed than the Marshall interview. Subsequent attempts to contact the women to obtain additional information were only marginally successful. Sure Shot and Baker granted brief telephone interviews, but chose to provide minimal information. I attempted further contact with Lady Luscious but was unsuccessful, as her phone was disconnected and her schedule overbooked.

Interviews and Biographies

As recommended for ethnographic research, all interviews followed a guided but fairly unstructured format (Lofland and Lofland). In other words, the interviews were conducted using an interview guide but questions were tailored in each case to allow the respondents to direct the flow of information as much as possible. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit narratives about their personal past, performance background,
ideas about performing and songwriting, and favorite artists and songs. The interview
guide was designed to evoke narratives in order to determine whether African American
women confront multiple jeopardy in their personal lives and further to determine
whether their talk about their lives has parallels with the music they choose to sing.
According to textual theorist Robert Scholes, artists are products of the cultures that
produce them, and the art they provoke, in turn, arises from and responds to their
contemporary culture. If the bluesqueens selected for the study are, indeed, subject to
multiple jeopardy, one might expect to detect influences of multiple jeopardy in their life
stories.

The interview guide contains questions asked of the blueswomen in an attempt to
determine whether they implicitly or explicitly recognize the operation of racism, sexism,
and/or classism in their life experiences when choosing songs for performance (See
Appendix B). The interview guide is divided into three sections. The first section probes
personal history and its relationship to the lyrics of the songs they choose to perform. It
includes questions about their childhood, singing career, their concept of the blues, and
the subjects of the lyrics they write themselves. The second group of questions seeks
information regarding the artists' actual and preferred audiences. The questions also seek
information about the artist's personal experiences as a musician in various communities.
The artists are asked to describe the qualities of both an ideal and a least-favorite
audience. The questions in this section also asked on whose behalf do their songs speak
(e.g., African Americans, women). The final group of questions is general and is
designed to stimulate more extended narratives and personal accounts. Although these responses are elicited through prompts, their generality allows the subjects to select and present information that they deem important and appropriate. The questions probe the subjects’ values by asking what they would like to be remembered for fifty years from now and by inquiring about their most memorable performances.

The interviews were audio taped and transcribed, producing forty-one pages of dialogue. Because of the difficulties in obtaining additional access to the bluesqueens and because of similarities in the types of data, the personal interviews were combined with CD biographies available as music liner notes from the Gates City Blueswomen’s recent release. The biographies, though written by a source other than the bluesqueens, were based on personal interviews with the Gates City Blueswomen. The biographies, in most instances, quote the blueswomen extensively. The biographies produced four additional pages of data for a total of forty-five pages of material. I did not have access to a biography about Marshall since one did not appear in her audiocassette; however, because Marshall's interview was more in depth than the interviews with the Gates City Blueswomen, it produced an equivalent amount of background information.

The data was coded by the researcher using the constant comparison method of analysis (Patton), which allows the researcher to continually reevaluate data in order to make connections between the themes that emerge during the data collection process thereby establishing a more holistic coding procedure. In the coding process, the transcripts were examined and codes were assigned according to episodes of talk. Once
the codes began to emerge, recurrent patterns were noted. When the coding was complete, areas of commonality among the codes were identified and the codes were grouped according to themes. A total of 229 episodes of talk were identified. Coding was recorded based on shifts in talk as opposed to length of dialogue. It was not uncommon for a segment of talk to be multiply coded or for an entire page or lengthy passage to receive a single code.

From the transcribed interviews and biographies, a total of forty-nine codes emerged. These codes were examined for areas of commonality and were reduced to eleven major themes, each with three or more codes. The primary themes for the interviews and biographies were: 1) meaning of the blues, 2) background, 3) identity issues, 4) creation of songs, 5) performance, 6) racism, 7) sexism, 8) classism, 9) audience, 10) validation as artists, and 11) extraneous comments.

"Meaning of the blues" refers to the bluesqueens' discussion of their perceptions of the elements of the blues as a distinct musical genre. "Background" refers to any information about the singers' lives, including important influences, individuals, and events from the past that impact self-perception and performance preferences. The theme "identity issues" refers to the bluesqueens' conceptions of self as well as what they perceive their roles to be in their various communities and families. The theme "creation of songs" pertains to what the interviewees acknowledged as important in the process of writing their own music and lyrics. "Performance" identifies preferences, opinions, and experiences the subjects note as important for live performance. This theme includes
their motivations behind for performing and comparisons between themselves and other performers.

The sixth theme, "racism," is defined as discrimination the bluesqueens confront based on the color of their skin. This theme emerged as a theme from the interviewees' discussion of their experiences with white audiences, other African Americans, and the entertainment industry. The theme "sexism" pertains to discrimination the bluesqueens have faced as a result of their biological sex from audiences and from people in the entertainment industry. "Classism" emerged as a theme in the bluesqueens' recognition of the lack of financial support they have received from both the community and the entertainment industry. The theme "audience" describes both the types of audiences that attend their concerts as well as the treatment they both prefer and receive from audiences. "Validation as artists" explains the manner in which the bluesqueens have been received by the music industry and the type of recognition they have experienced as artists in the community. This theme differs from their experiences with racism, sexism, and classism in that it discusses what the bluesqueens have done to prove themselves as artists and how they have come to be "discovered" in the industry. Finally, the comments that pertained to intermittent conversations with individuals outside of the interviews (e.g., bandmembers, friends) were coded as extraneous comments.

The breadth of codes was due, in part, to the breadth of the subject matter covered as well as the unstructured nature of the interviews. The bluesqueens were allowed to stray from the subject of the moment. Free association of ideas was encouraged to elicit
longer responses and to let the subjects guide the interview process as much as possible. The tactic was particularly important because of some subjects' reluctance to respond freely to issue-oriented (e.g., racism) questions.

Following initial coding, two independent coders analyzed the data to assess reliability. They were supplied with copies of the coded data and a list of themes, codes, and definitions. The independent coders examined all assigned codes and noted areas of disagreement with the coding. Percentage of agreement reflected an intercoder reliability of 93% (213 episodes in agreement). Areas of disagreement were discussed among all three coders until consensus was reached on all codings where the coders disagreed.

Lyrics

The songs used for the study came from the bluesqueens' published (i.e., recorded and commercially released) material. My justification for using published songs is that artists often choose songs for inclusion in a recording that have been refined in live performance. By choosing songs from published sources, I am choosing songs that have gone through a preselection process by the bluesqueens and, therefore, songs that represent a measure of importance to them as black female artists. Lyrics were transcribed from two sources: a CD released by Lady Luscious, Sure Shot, and Lashunia Baker entitled *The Gates City Blueswomen* (1996) and an audiocassette released by Marshall called *Oh Happy Day* (1995). Marshall's audiocassette consists of American gospel music classics.
Although Marshall defines herself as a blues singer both through self-report and by the relative amount of time she spends singing the blues, she had not released a blues recording either prior to or during the time of this study. The justification for using lyrics from a gospel audiocassette is the similarity between the two musical genres, which is noted by both scholars and the bluesqueens who served as subjects for the study (Oliver, Lomax, and Bolcom).

Paul Oliver claims that the origins of blues and gospel are the same, both having arisen from "similar roots of segregationalism" (191). In addition, blues style permeates gospel, which is referred to by some performers as "the holy blues" (207). Oliver notes that many gospel songs so closely resemble blues that they have "entered the rhythm and blues list" (218). The lyrics of the two genres may reflect the experiences of African Americans differently in that the blues focuses on earthly problems while gospel focuses on an idealized future in the afterlife and the requisite steps to achieve that future. Nevertheless, both are primarily concerned with "the struggle of black people to regain their sense of pride and identity" after the suffering they endured during slavery (191). The bluesqueens themselves pronounce the importance of the relationship between gospel and blues. According to Lady Luscious, "... blues is just like gospel. It's just a turn around on gospel ... I mean it's like being in church one day and being in the club the next. You get the same audience, so to speak. The same response."

After transcribing the songs, the constant comparison method was used again for coding (Patton). This entailed identifying emergent codes in the lyrics and then watching
for them to recur. After the songs were coded, the codes were grouped into major themes. The songs were coded separately from the interviews and biographies. In coding the songs separately, I hoped to avoid a bias that might occur if I utilized the codes developed from the initial set of data. Therefore, a different set of codes were allowed to emerge from the coding of the song lyrics. An additional reason for allowing a new set of codes to emerge through separate coding is my recognition that, as a traditional genre, the blues will yield certain standard themes that may fall outside the type of information I obtained through the personal interviews and the biographies.

From the ten songs that were coded, 76 episodes were identified. The episodes were identified according to changes in subject matter as opposed to lines, stanzas, or other structural features of the songs. Many passages were assigned more than one code, and, in some cases, an entire song would represent one code start to finish.

A total of thirty-eight codes emerged from the process of coding the song lyrics. The codes were examined for areas of commonality and eventually were reduced to thirteen primary themes: 1) relationships, 2) expectations from a man, 3) power, 4) Christianity, 5) feeling/emotion, 6) resistance/rebellion, 7) humor, 8) community/family, 9) advice, 10) status, 11) hard work, 12) play, and 13) hard times. The theme “relationships” refers to the elements of romantic relationships that the interviewees discuss in their lyrics. “Expectations from a man” is defined as the demands the personae of the lyrics place on their men, namely sexual, relational, and emotional demands. The theme “power” is defined as the dynamics involving control in the romantic relationships
the bluesqueens describe. "Christianity" refers to religious topics such as eternal life and salvation. "Feeling and emotion" describes the aspects of the songs that have particular impact due to an impassioned quality of the words. "Resistance/Rebellion" refers to the renegade, "go against the grain" element of certain passages of the lyrics. "Humor" is defined as the tendency of some personae in the songs to create an atmosphere of fun by boasting, and humiliating various individuals. The theme "community and family" is characterized as the impact of family and community on relationships and personal decisions. The theme "advice" refers to the personae’s tendency to inform the audience about how to make decisions. "Status" is defined as the boasting of the personae’s position within a social hierarchy. "Hard work" refers to the personae’s recognition of the labor required to survive both in their daily lives and in the music industry. "Play" refers to the personae’s emphasis on being able to enjoy oneself in this life. Finally, "hard times" refers to the difficult circumstances beyond the personae’s control and the struggles the personae confront in their daily lives. The breadth of the songs is great, in part, because the songs spanned the range of blues, gospel, and popular music, and the lyrics covered a diversity of topics.

Following initial coding, two independent coders analyzed the data to assess reliability. They were supplied with copies of the coded lyrics and a list of codes, subcodes, and definitions. The independent coders examined all codes and noted areas of disagreement. Intercoder reliability was calculated using percentage of agreement. Intercoder reliability was calculated at 95% (72 episodes in agreement). Areas of
disagreement were discussed among all three coders until consensus was reached on all codings where the coders disagreed.

Direct Observation

In addition to data collection, I attended the subjects' performances. After establishing working relationships with the blueswomen, I would call them for information about upcoming performances. Because of the connections with the subjects, I learned of a few unadvertised concerts that were attended primarily by acquaintances and friends of the blueswomen.

At these performances I engaged in direct observation and took notes. In addition to noting the songs they performed, I observed the ethnic, sex, and class backgrounds of the audience, the audiences' response to the performance, the interaction among band members, some of the direct comments performers made to their audiences, the personae they projected on stage, and the challenges I perceived that the blueswomen faced during live performances. These observations, though not a part of my data set, informed the coding process, the results, and the discussion.

Results from the coding of the interviews and biographies are reported in chapter three. Chapter four reports the coding of the lyrics. The fifth chapter provides an interpretation of the results reported in the third and fourth chapters.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Chapter three reports the results of the coding process for the interviews and biographies. There are eleven sections, one for each major theme that emerged from the data. Each section provides a definition of the theme, a description of each code that falls under the major theme, a report of the rank of frequency of the codes, and examples from the interviews that help explain the codings. Finally, each section summarizes the codes that emerged under the theme.

Personal interviews were conducted with Gates City bluesqueens Lashunia Baker, Bessie Marsall, Lady Luscious, and Sure Shot. Because of difficulties in obtaining additional access to the bluesqueens and because of similarities in the type of data used, the personal interviews were combined with biographies available as music liner notes from a recently released CD on which the Gates City Blueswomens collaborated (1996). The biographies, though written by a source other than the bluesqueens, were based on personal interviews with the Gates City Blueswomen. No biography was available for Marshall; however, because her personal interview was more in depth, it provided adequate background information that proved equivalent to the biographies of the Gates City Blueswomen. The personal interviews and biographies were coded using the constant comparison method (Patton).
From the interviews and biographies, a total of forty-nine codes emerged. These codes were examined for areas of commonality and ultimately were reduced to eleven major themes. The primary themes for the interviews and biographies were: 1) background, 2) identity, 3) meaning of the blues, 4) creation of songs, 5) performance issues, 6) racism, 7) sexism, 8) classism, 9) audience, 10) validation as artists, and 11) extraneous. The breadth of codes was due, in part, to the diverse subject matter discussed as well as the unstructured nature of the interviews. The interviewees were allowed to stray from the topic. Free association of ideas was encouraged to elicit longer responses and to let the subjects guide the interview process as much as possible. This strategy was important because of some subjects' reluctance to respond freely to issue-oriented (e.g., racism) questions.

Themes

The personal interviews and three biographies covered a wide range of topics. Issues regarding self and perception, performance style, music tastes, audience preferences, spirituality, and oppression were broached and explored. Despite the extensive number of topics covered in the interviews and biographies, the results of the coding process revealed patterns, similarities, and dissonances among the subjects and their perception on a variety of topics. This section discusses each of the themes and provides examples from the interviews and biographies that exemplify the results of the data analysis process.
Background

The bluesqueens’ interviews and biographies provide background information about the singers lives and identify the important influences, individuals, and events from the past that impact self-perception and performance preferences. The codes grouped under this theme include: 1) influence of family and church, 2) performance background, 3) hard times, 4) influence of gospel music, 5) influence of female entertainers, 6) influence of male entertainers, and 7) hopes for future success.

The code influence of family and church was prevalent in all four interviews and all three biographies. Each performer began singing in a church choir at a young age. Remarks Sure Shot, “I started singing when I was five. I used to lead the choir. I was the only little girl in the choir and I just walked up and took my place—you know, like Tina Turner.” The others had similar experiences in churches. Lady Luscious states that she started “doing gospel at Fifth Street Baptist Church. Four years old. Started four turnin’ five. And started out leading ‘Jesus Loves Me.’” Marshall also performed in Sunday school and had an inspiration to sing at a young age. Her “first love” was baseball, but then, she claims, “I started waking up in the middle the night singing like I sing.” Baker states that her family has always been active in the church and in “gospel groups.”

The influence of family played a large role in the formation of the bluesqueens’ musical and personal identities. Two of the subjects, Lady Luscious and Sure Shot, are sisters who grew up under the influence of a musically talented mother. Lady Luscious recalls a story about their mother:
When Sure Shot and I was small, we thought our mother was a movie star so to speak cause Friday night she would turn the lights down low . . . and when she said ‘showtime’ and just ah—she just come out singing and dancing and so she was among a thousand people. I mean that would actually sing and dance.

The sisters also talk about learning from each other. During the interview Lady Luscious said she taught Sure Shot to “swing out” (i.e., to hold notes beyond the length of their normal rhythm and thereby make the rhythm of the melody more complex). Sure Shot also explains that her mother would threaten to put her out on the porch whenever she sang opera, “So it was a good thing I decided not to sing opera.” Baker explains that when she was young, she learned by listening to her sister sing and then singing the same songs herself. Marshall grew up in Louisiana under the influence of parents who sang in gospel groups and churches. It is not surprising, therefore, that churches and gospel groups provided Marshall with her earliest singing experiences.

In both the interviews and the biographies, all of the bluesqueens discuss their performance backgrounds. As different as the bluesqueens’ performance histories are, they are rife with commonalites. Lady Luscious and Marshall started their blues singing careers somewhat late in life. Although Lady Luscious never states at what age she began singing the blues, she claims that of the three women that comprise The Gates City Blueswomen, “I’m the oldest of the bunch. I’m the nastiest of the bunch. And I started late in the bunch.” Marshall also identifies herself as a late bloomer in her career.
as a blues artist. She reveals that she began singing the blues in her late thirties, but argues that “Blues singers can be a little older. They don’t have very many female blues singers around.”

All four singers have toured at one point or another. The members of the Gates City Blueswomen all traveled with gospel groups when they were first starting out in their late teens. Marshall sang in Louisiana at various music and jazz festivals and then moved to Texas to sing at the club in which she plays six nights a week and Sunday mornings.

All four bluesqueens identify the significance of gospel music in their backgrounds. For each, gospel music was their introduction to performing in front of large crowds and traveling with a music group. Lady Luscious, Sure Shot, and Baker continue to sing gospel both in church and on the road. Baker and Lady Luscious performed a gospel concert in Finland two years ago. Marshall began singing in Sunday School and continues to sing gospel. She has a permanent gospel engagement every Sunday morning at a club frequented predominantly by white tourists in downtown Gates City.

The performers noted hard times as a part of their background. This code was defined as elements of the subjects’ personal histories that they recognized as trying or difficult. Although the members of The Gates City Blueswomen refer to general hard times in their past, such as when Sure Shot recalls she wrote a song when she was “down,” only Marshall identifies specific situations from her past that were trying. As
the oldest daughter in her family, she raised her siblings. She remarks, "I thought I was living in hell. I thought those days would never end." She also raised two daughters single-handedly without any help from the government or from their father: "By myself. By myself. No welfare, no food stamps, no child support."

The bluesqueens noted artists that served as influences on their musical careers. Male influences and female influences were coded separately. The three members of the Gates City Blueswomen mentioned only female performers. Sure Shot and Baker both noted Aretha Franklin as their favorite singer. Baker states that Aretha "has a soulful groove that I like. She's a real soulful singer." Sure Shot also mentioned Pati LaBelle and Gladys Knight. Marshall mentions Mahalia Jackson as influential, but Sam Cooke, a male blues performer, stands as her favorite all-time singer. Lady Luscious did not identify either female or male artists as influences.

All of the blues performers have achieved some measure of success and fame in their careers. Each interviewee remembers being acknowledged for her talent at one time or another, and enjoying recognition from an agent, a large crowd, a clubowner, or a famous band. The hope for future success also was coded in the interviews and biographies. The Gates City Blueswomen hope to achieve a greater measure of notoriety. Says Baker, "I'm hopin' we all do well and we all go far." Sure Shot hopes for both artistic recognition and recognition from her family. She maintains a scrapbook for her granddaughter, who is named for her stage persona, and states that "my public is going to remember me, then again they might forget. But Sure Shot [the granddaughter] will be
able to say 'well my grandmother was an entertainer.'” Marshall hopes to play more jazz festivals in the future “if she lives.” Lady Luscious expresses enthusiasm about the Gates City Blueswomen because they are unique; Gates City has never had an “all blueswomen show.”

The bluesqueens' personal history, personal and career influences, and general past experiences are all part of what comprise the theme background. Their personal backgrounds have shaped their personal philosophies, which in turn, effected their decisions with regard to their career.

Identity

While the codes grouped under the theme “background” describe where these women came from and who and what has influenced them in both life and career, the codes for identity explain more specifically how they think and see the world. These codes characterize what the women stand for, fight for, respect, and devalue. The codes under the theme identity are: 1) self respect/pride, 2) resistance/rebellion, 3) self-reliance, 4) standing for the truth 5) responsibility to others, 6) Christianity, 7) altruism, 8) family, and 9) community.

Self-respect/pride emerged as the dominant code in the interviews and biographies, surfacing more often than any other code. In their discussions of almost every topic, expressions of self-esteem and confidence prevail. The interviews provide numerous examples of the blueswomen's determination and self-worth. Marshall, in discussing a racist experience she had in a club, proclaims “I mean, cause you know, I'm
a United States veteran. I have said, I don’t give a damn what nobody thinks. This
country’s mine. I have served it and I love it.” For Baker, the idea of establishing her
own musical identity and reputation gives her a great sense of pride. She claims, “I’ve
really written two songs by myself on my own original CD [Due to be released in
October 1997] Two of em’s mine.” Later she reveals that in the near future she will be
performing at a club by herself, without the Gates City Blueswomen.

In the CD biography, Lady Luscious asserts, “If the Lord didn’t want me to sing,
he wouldn’t have opened my mouth.” She and Sure Shot feel confident they will be
remembered and respected. “The real thing is a good thing,” declares Lady Luscious
about the Gates City Blueswomen. In the interviews and biographies, the bluesqueens
continually make statements that reflect their sense of self-worth as artists, and pronounce
their performances to be exceptional and honorable. They also express pride in their
appearance and in their stage personae. Sure Shot discusses the respect she has for
herself and her fellow Gates City Blueswomen. Audiences, she claims, will want to see
them perform because they are full-figured women and they are “moving.” In claiming
her status as the “oldest and the nastiest of the bunch,” the one who “started late in the
bunch,” Lady Luscious affirms her own identity and abilities and embraces the image that
she has chosen to project in her stage performances.

Resistance/rebellion emerged as an important code under the identity theme. As a
result of their unique vocation, the bluesqueens behave in ways that are not traditional for
black women. They embrace a “renegade” attitude, contesting the limitations placed on
them as African American women and finding ways to resist the stereotypical roles they are expected to fulfill. Rather than accept the status quo, they emphasize the importance of standing up for themselves and challenging systems and individuals when they perceive them as oppressive.

Marshall rebels against the entertainment industry. She explains, “Some of ’em——they have these little clans, y’know, where you have to get into the group thing. But luckily I’m not in it. I’m just straight up with ‘em.” She also speaks of resisting pressure from the black community to accept narrow views about the relationships between races. “I don’t see things the way that they do. I’ll just tell them ‘I’m sorry you feel that way.’”

In general, Baker, Lady Luscious, and Sure Shot resist traditional standards of beauty by celebrating their status as “full-figured” women. They shake, move, dance, groove and, often, tell their audiences what big women can do. Lady Luscious claims that “Basically, when I talk about big girls, I’m saying that they can do what little women can do. They can do it just as well. Even better.”

Sure Shot, along with the other Gates City Blueswomen, resists sexism from the women in the audience who get jealous or annoyed by the performers’ bragging about “what big women can do.” Sure Shot, in relating an incident that happened with a woman in a club, states, “And I said ‘I’m sorry, but it’s a show. It’s a show!’” And you know, if she didn’t want to be there, I started to say, ‘if you don’t want to be there, take your dead self home.’” She also rebels when she has an unresponsive, unappreciative crowd, by acting her “wildest” on stage.
Resistance is not an attitude expressed only to outsiders. Baker resists going along with the decisions of her women’s music group. After vocalizing her disapproval of the decision of the fellow Gates City Blueswomen to change their name from the Texas Blueswomen to the Gates City Blueswomen, she remarks “I’m still Texas Blueswoman Lashunia Baker. That’s who I am. Yeah, I’m still Texas Blueswoman Lashunia Baker. I’ma tell ya like that.”

Under the theme of identity the code self-reliance manifested itself in the interviews and biographies a number of times as well. The code was defined as dependence on the self to carry out tasks, often without help. When she discussed hard times and spoke about raising her daughters, Marshall repeated that she did it by herself without assistance or help from the government or the children’s father. She also speaks of having to make it in the music world without an agent or manager. Sure Shot discusses a recent incident in which she had to rely on herself during a performance because the band cut off her song too early. She had to handle the situation and cue the band members.

All of the bluesqueens have had to rely on themselves to launch their careers, usually by joining a large traveling group of musicians as a starting point. Later in their careers they achieved recognition and made names for themselves without relying on the groups with which they originally sang.

Standing for the truth was another identity code evident in the data. This code is defined as understanding what is “right” and speaking on its behalf. Marshall, in
particular, defines herself and chooses actions based on what she consider “right.” When speaking about who her songs represent, she proclaims, “I wouldn’t say they speak for someone. I’d say they—I’d like for them to speak the truth. You know, cause its so simple. And people make the truth kind of hard.” In the interview, she also claims to stand for racial unity. “. . . We can’t all ever be one without all the colors being together like a rainbow. It takes all the colors in the rainbow. If it was one color, it wouldn’t be a rainbow, right?”

For Baker, “truth” is “being the understanding person that I am.” She claims that she chooses not to sing some songs in front of certain crowds, “depending on the meaning of that song.” The truth in her performances is that she chooses what to sing based on what she feels the crowd is capable of understanding and appreciating from the music. Sure Shot finds truth in preserving her performance history for the granddaughter who is named after her. Safeguarding the truth of her past is almost equivalent to a virtue in her life.

Of the four subjects of this study, only Marshall and Sure Shot made comments about their lives and their performances that were coded as responsibility toward others. Responsibility toward others describes an obligation the artist feels toward other people, particularly a sense that other people need their help and prayers. Marshall discusses responsibility beyond the contexts in which she was responsible for rearing children first as an oldest daughter then as a single mother: “But shoosh! I’ve always been responsible for other people all of my life. So now I still don’t—I feel guilty if I go out and buy
something for myself. You know, I'm thinking I should be doing something for other people." Marshall, who worked as a social worker for three years, expresses an ongoing desire to help people who are less fortunate. With regard to racism, she assumes some white people are unable to conceive of their own ignorance, and in such situations assumes responsibility that racists are incapable of assuming.

Sure Shot recognizes a sense of responsibility in her performances and in her personal life. She claims, "you can't just sing and just enjoy yourself because some people are very sensitive." She also recognizes the emotional impact that her performances may have on audiences and carefully considers her responsibility to audiences stating, "And then when you look at the facial expressions of some people, you wanted to go like, God, I mean you can't believe it. You've captured voices—and people's emotions like that. It's hard... it's a trip to believe a person can do that to another person." In her personal life, she admits that she sees less fortunate individuals and prays for them to get through their particular situations and hard times.

Christianity, another code under the theme of identity, permeated many topics. All of the blueswomen spoke of spirituality, prayer, and the Lord. In her biography, Lady Luscious claims that she "says her prayers" before every performance. All four grew up in Christian churches and Baker, Lady Luscious, and Sure Shot still attend church. Marshall claims that part of being a good Christian is accepting everyone and living with understanding between the races. She says, "I mean, how often do you say you're a
Christian if you can hate someone? Another person?” Marshall, who also has served as a missionary, declares that “you can’t study God’s word and not listen.”

Another code under the theme of identity that is closely tied to Christianity is the code altruism. Marshall and Sure Shot, in particular, place a great deal of emphasis on helping others. As mentioned above, Marshall did social work for three years and is a missionary as well. She claims that her duty is to help people, not judge them. “If I give to the need and the person takes it and does something else with it, at least I’ve done my job. That’s the way I feel. So I can see—if I see someone hurting, it’s my business to stop and see about my fellow man. We—people got to look out for one another.”

Sure Shot feels the need to help her audience members by uplifting them. As noted earlier, she is aware of her impact upon audiences and takes this role seriously. She also prays for people and in this way feels she is helping them. Altruism did not emerge as a code for Baker or Lady Luscious.

Family and community were codes that emerged as part of the theme of identity. The blueswomen do not see themselves as separate from their community or their families. During the interviews they speak about families as important influences in their past. They also discuss the importance of family members in the present. Sure Shot and Lady Luscious refer to each other throughout their interviews in an affectionate way. Lady Luscious looks over at Sure Shot and proclaims “I taught her how to swing out.” Sure Shot glances back at Luscious and remarks, “Well, she can really swing out.” Marshall expresses pride in her daughters and the fact that they are gifted musicians.
Community, part of the family and community code, often refers to close friends and other members of the entertainment industry. When asked about the status of the Gates City Blueswomen, each member of the group repeated the name of the group, communicating a sense of belonging and pride in the group. Baker states that by being part of the music business and by making friends within it, “people see you as individuals, you know, just moving around, like that’s how we got to borrow this mike.” As far as the communities around them, Sure Shot notes that tied up in the notion of the blues is “looking out and seeing someone less fortunate than you, to me.” The blueswomen all identified a responsibility to audiences and those around them.

How the interviewees understand and explain their place in the world, who they value, their perceptions of other people, and spirituality are all tied in to the bluesqueen’s understanding of identity. Identity, in turn, informs other areas of the blueswomen’s lives and is reflected in the songwriting process, the selection of songs, and the conceptualization of music and blues.

Meaning of the Blues

The theme meaning of the blues defines how the interviewees conceptualize the music genre they claim to love most. The manner in which they conceptualize the blues and its various intricacies is tied to several important concepts. These concepts surfaced as the following five codes: 1) spiritual, 2) compares to gospel, 3) emotional and inspirational, 4) inspired by hard times, and 5) related to classism.
Although the spiritual nature of the blues goes unquestioned for all four interviewees, each conceptualizes “spiritual” uniquely. For coding the interviews, “spiritual” is defined as any allusion to the magical, religious, or uplifting qualities of the blues. While it usually is connected with Christianity, “spiritual” can mean something as simple as feeling a presence from music. Of the blues, Marshall claims, “Well it's a spiritual thing, it really is . . . because I can’t even draw—I can only draw stick people. But I know that I have another spiritual thing. Where the other person's the artist in this way, I'm an artist in another way.” Lady Luscious claims that blues has a spiritual quality about it, just like gospel, but that it “just transforms.” Baker stresses the need to sing spiritually uplifting blues and that old blues don't have the uplifting quality of the blues she sings. She states that old blues are “too 'aaawwhhh,' that type thing...like they're crying too much for me.” Sure Shot recognizes the spiritual in the blues when she responds that the blues is looking out in the audience, seeing people having hard times, and feeling “blessed by the Lord.”

The strong connection between blues and gospel is evident in comments by all of the blueswomen and was identified as a code under the theme meaning of the blues. Lady Luscious, in particular, feels strongly about the relationship of the two music genres. In the biography on the Gates City Blueswomen's CD, Lady Luscious declares, “I feel so spiritual when I sing the blues, it's not any different than when I sing gospel. It's not even a different crowd! Some of the folks I sing blues to at night, I'll see 'em in
church when I sing gospel at day! So I gotcha comin’ and goin’!” In the interview she asserts

Because if you have any kind of gospel religion, then you’re gonna have that spirit. That spirit is there. It just transforms, whereas in the blues, you know if you’re poppin’ your thang—and now days, I mean it’s a contemporary gospel or whatever they call it. So they’re still poppin’ their thang and you don’t know the blues and you don’t know the blues from the gospel because of the instruments that they use, that I don’t see nothing wrong with. But, it’s no different to me.

Of the blues, Baker states, “It’s the same as the gospel, but it’s a different meaning. But the rhythm is basically the same.” Although Sure Shot and Marshall make no specific statements about the interrelationship of the two, their personal backgrounds are based in gospel, they express a continuing commitment to singing gospel music in churches and clubs, and they perceive the blues as spiritual and uplifting.

The perception that the blues exhibit an emotional, inspirational dimension surfaced and was coded under the theme meaning of the blues. The code emotion and inspiration refers to the conceptualization of the blues as an invoker of strong feelings. The correlation between emotion and inspiration in the blues is evident in Marshall’s assertion that “It’s something inside a person that makes them feel that strongly about something.” Lady Luscious identifies the emotion and inspiration she receives from the
blues: “So, it’s the same thing [as gospel]. Not so much—I hear a lot of people say that blues makes them sad. But it shouldn’t. It should help them in life.”

When asked to respond to “what is the blues,” Sure Shot states “It’s just a soulful feeling. It’s just something that you feel inside... Just your emotions.” She also recognizes that blues is where her heart is as far as performance: “Now it’s like I’m stuck or something, you know, it feels good now. The feeling is good.” Baker recognizes the emotional and inspirational impact of the blues as well; she speaks about wanting to avoid singing anything but uplifting blues. She is committed to singing inspirational blues because, “when you basically drag something on and just wear it down, you can’t probably run it too long. It’s just there.”

Blues inspired by hard times is another code that surfaced under the theme meaning of the blues. Blues is born out of the notion that life is not easy and that human beings suffer trials while on earth. After responding that blues is spiritual, Marshall states, “I mean its bad, but not bad bad. It’s good bad. And most singers most of the time—people go through a lot. They say they go through a lot...I’ve been through quite a bit already.” Sure Shot also conceives of the blues as a product of hard times. When discussing a blues song she wrote, she states she was “going through some things” in her life and that she was “down.” Lady Luscious and Baker did not comment on a correlation between hard times and blues music.

The final code under the theme meaning of the blues notes the relationship between classism and blues music. Classism refers to being poor. Of the four
interviewees, only Sure Shot claims outright that “Blues is like when you want to go shopping and you can’t cause you gotta pay another bill.” Baker and Lady Luscious, who were in the room, laughed in agreement at this remark. Marshall made no remarks about the relationship between being poor and the blues, though it is interesting to note the degree to which she discusses the trials of her life the fact that blues is her music of choice.

For all of the artists the meaning of the blues clearly is related to notions of spirituality. Although each of the artists defines this term differently, each comes form a religious background and has experience with gospel singing. The blues, for these artists, are based in emotion and, though they are associated with hard times, are often described as inspirational for the performers and uplifting for the audience.

Creation of Songs

Although the interviewees provided few details about their personal songwriting processes, some comments were made that explained, to some degree, their sources of inspiration and the actual methods they use to compose music and create lyrics. This theme includes four codes: 1) emotion and inspiration, 2) family, 3) hard times, and 4) love.

Emotion and inspiration was coded when the interviewees explained how their feelings act as a catalyst for the creation of a particular song. Marshall illustrates how songs “come to her” when she says, “Sometimes the melody will come into my head then I’ll write the lyrics to the way the melody feels to me. I write words to the music I hear.”
When Baker describes the songwriting process, she states, “Sometimes I just feel like it. That whole talking to myself thing. Somebody’ll say something and I’ll say ‘you know, I better write that down.’” Sure Shot mentions spiritual inspiration as the impetus for some of her material. She explains one incident:

You know sometimes when you go through some things in your life and it was primarily I was down. And I sat and I prayed. And I mean I spoke to the Lord. And he inspired that, that particular . . . I was inspired by that. Yeah. ‘Yesterday my heart was hurting and filled with so much pain.’

Something like that.

Lady Luscious does not comment on the role of emotion and inspiration in the creation of original songs.

Only one of the women identifies family as a source of inspiration for her songwriting. This instance was coded as family under the theme creation of songs. Sure Shot wrote a poem for her sister, Lady Luscious, entitled “Hot Tail Mama.” Sure Shot notes that family inspires some of her songwriting. She wrote a poem for her sister, Lady Luscious, titled “Hot Tail Mama.” Because Lady Luscious reminded her that she had never written a poem about her, she sat down and wrote it. Sure Shot entitled the poem “Hot Tail Mama” because “she [Lady Luscious] was always more outgoing than I was.”

The code love denotes another source of inspiration in the creation of songs. Baker and Marshall note that love inspires the creation of their music. Baker states that
she usually writes love ballads, and Marshall remarks "even the love letter becomes a song." The other two interviewees did not comment on love as a source of inspiration.

The blueswomen spent very little time discussing their songwriting practices, yet each writes original material. These brief comments about their practices suggest that their material comes from their personal experiences, their philosophy of life, and love.

Performance Issues

The theme performance issues accounts for emergent codes that dealt with preferences, significance of style, and opinions about the live dimensions of performing blues music. As a theme, performance issues yielded the following codes: 1) appearance, 2) competition, 3) pleasing self, 4) pleasing audience, 5) emotional release, 6) pragmatics of performance, and 7) pretending/for "show."

Appearance was the dominant code found under the theme performance issues. Marshall, however, never remarks on her appearance or personae on stage. For the Gates City Blueswomen, however, how one appears in front of an audience proved highly significant. Sure Shot comments on the public image of the Gates City Blueswomen:

Like everybody's really inquisitive now about the Gates City Blueswomen because there's nothing like that. Then we're full-figured women also, so they come and see us and we're moving, you know. I mean they're gonna think that we're energetic, you know? Big women are energetic.

She also discusses her physical movements on the stage, as well as Baker's. She says, "I have a nervous leg, but I mean different people feel it in different ways. You know, so,
like Patti slaps her arms. Patti Labelle slaps her arms. And I shake my leg. I shake my little leg. Lashunia wiggles her hand like this.” Although Lady Luscious never mentions it, Sure Shot and Baker both comment that Luscious knows how to show an audience “what a big woman can do,” referring to a hip-shaking, head-to-toe dance maneuver that she performs at every show.

Appearance is emphasized throughout the interviews, and is most evident in discussions about audience response. The biography on Lady Luscious, included in The Gates City Blueswomen CD, warns, “Those who like their women anorexic and demure should stay shy of Lady Luscious. Those of sterner stuff, stay put.” The CD biography also claims, “Risque is too wussy a word for Ms. Luscious; she does an audience walk-through wherein she acts out the polishing of a chair and not with a dustcloth!” (1996).

Competition, another code that appeared often under the theme performance issues, accounts for the blueswomen’s comments about being the best, being original, having no competition from others in the entertainment industry, and being “better” than other entertainers and the women in the audiences. In discussing female blues singers, Marshall claims, “There’s a shortage of ’em. Yeah, that’s why I like it. I’ll be a brand new blues singer coming out there before everybody else.” Lady Luscious feels a sense of accomplishment and superiority about her group’s success when she notes with pride that the Gates City Blueswomen is Gates City’s first all-blueswomen show: “Usually when a show opens up, you know, you have male entertainers and then one lady might come out and open up, but this is the first.”
Sure Shot and Baker both identify competition from women in their audiences. Baker recognizes this competition and speaks of three different incidents in which she had problems with female audience members wanting to physically harm her. One woman tried to pull a chair out from under Baker after seeing her perform. Baker claims that the women's actions are motivated by the fact that she sings to men in the audience, which sometimes evokes jealousy. Baker also feels a sense of competition with her peers, Lady Luscious and Sure Shot. During the interviews she acknowledges that they work together sometimes under the same name, but she also asserts her individual identity by pointing out that she does her own shows and plans to release her own material independent of the other two.

Sure Shot notes that "little women" get angry when she talks to the audience about big women having as much or more to give to a man than little women. She recalls an incident in which a woman "walked up to James [a band member] and said, 'I didn't really appreciate what she said about little women.' I said well, I say it all the time, it's just part of my show." Baker validates Sure Shot at this point in the interview saying, "Basically, when I talk about big girls, I'm saying that they can do what little women can do. They can do it just as well. Even better."

Marshall, Sure Shot, and Lady Luscious discuss entering competitions, and winning them, when they were young. Marshall relates a story about her daughters entering a contest in which she was competing and ended up competing against her in the
final round. Of her daughters she claims, "When they found out how the business was, they resigned real quick-like."

While the bluesqueens all noted a sense of responsibility to others and an obligation to help uplift their audiences, they also feel a need to please themselves when they perform. Pleasing self and pleasing audience during performances are codes that emerged as interrelated and equally important performance issues. When one code appeared in the interviews, the consequences of both were discussed, usually within the same sentence.

Marshall explains the necessity for the artist to please herself by meeting inner, almost spiritual, demands of performance: "That's why you see a lot of artists settin' on the corner playing. They have to. They have to be able to let it out. You have to be able to vent yourself." She also goes on to state that her audience is important to her and their validation means the world to her.

Baker sings both for herself and for her audience. She claims, "... basically I try to please my crowd as well as--I'm gonna please myself." Sure Shot also perceives both as important when she says, "I sing for both. 'Cause some of the songs I sing I really feel the words and it's like Luscious said, it's like sometimes you're into it and you look out and you see somebody and they're gettin' into it and maybe they're kickin' their head like so. And you feel good."

The code emotional release is a performance issue that explains, in part, why the singers perform for themselves. Marshall's explanation of the artist sitting on the corner
who has to “let it out” is one example of this need for emotional release. The other
singers also recognize the significance of releasing emotion during performance. Sure
Shot’s “nervous leg” and the idea that she is “stuck” in the blues because it feels good are
examples of the emotional quality of performing blues that the interviewees value. Lady
Luscious describes emotional release when she discusses her feelings during performance
and remembers a particular concert: “I mean I cry when I sing the blues and I cry when I
sing gospel. So, when I was in Finland I was going to switch to spirit, so to speak. I was
trying not to get happy, but I couldn’t stop.”

Although the code pragmatics of performance did not surface many times, it
occurred often enough to warrant reporting. Pragmatics of performance are defined as the
practical elements of performance as well as the idea that one is “doing one's job” during
a performance. Only Marshall and Baker mention these practical elements of
performance. Referring to the unpredictability of the crowd, which may be “ten people or
ten-thousand,” Marshall speaks of the importance of getting on stage and “doing your
job, no matter what.” Baker states that sometimes it is important to “sing it and just get
through with it real quick” instead of “dragging something on.” She sees her songs not
only as potentially uplifting for her audience, but as artistic projects she must complete.

Sure Shot and Baker interpret performances as having a “for show” dimension.
As a code under the theme performance issues, pretending/beauty” characterizes what
the blueswomen refer to as the presenational or play elements of performance. When
Sure Shot speaks about the women in her audience being offended by what big women
can do, she asserts “But you know, it’s just a show.” Baker validates Sure Shot’s opinion, echoing “it’s just for show.” She remembers a story about a woman who, offended by Lady Luscious’ show, threatened her after the performance. Marshall and Lady Luscious made no comments on this subject.

The theme performance issues explains how the subjects perceive their role in live performances and describes their performance and audience preferences. The experiences the bluesqueens report that are related to performance issues also connect to other themes, such as facets of multiple jeopardy and validation as artists.

Racism

Racism emerged as a theme from the data, particularly the Marshall interview. Marshall is most willing to explain her encounters with it and her philosophy about race relations. The codes that emerged as belonging to this theme are racism 1) from white audiences and the white community, 2) from African Americans, and 3) from the entertainment industry. Marshall relates her worst racist experience with a white woman from her audience:
This lady came and searched me because her jacket was missing and we weren't even the same size and she had the bartender guy come shine the flashlight all over me and she said, Girl, what are you doing with my jacket on? and then when she found her jacket she didn't even have enough dignity to apologize. That—that offended me. Sure did.

Marshall's friend, who was present at the interview, argues that "the racial lines that are drawn are definitely wrong. It's like--the people here, they don't know why they hate blacks, but their mom and dad told them to. Both Marshall and her friend discuss how the racial climate in Louisiana, where Marshall is from, is not as tense. The friend notes, "Well, we all know we're kin down there in Louisiana... they're all related--black, white, Indian, and anything else."

Baker, Lady Luscious, and Sure Shot claimed they had not encountered difficulties with the white community or with white audiences. They perform in a variety of venues, including small affairs attended only by friends and community members and large, advertised events that are attended primarily by mixed audiences. Their crowds differ depending on where they perform and, according to Baker, they can "please any kind of crowd." When asked to characterize the crowd that attends their concerts, Lady Luscious makes no mention of race. Instead, she replies, "Happy. Happy. They're into it." None of three broaches the issue of racism from the white community or white audiences, even when directly questioned about the subject.
An interesting code that emerged only in Marshall's interview was racism from African Americans. The morning of the interview she performed in a gospel concert in Gates City with numerous other African American gospel groups. She claims the black community does not like or support her. According to Marshall, other performers at the concert snubbed her because they feel that she has "sold out" to the white community, because she plays with an all-white band in a predominantly white club. She claims she has stopped trying to "fit in" with the people who do not accept her: "It's put right in my face. But I don't see things the way that they do. I'll just tell them, 'I'm sorry you feel that way.'" She also claims that disconfirmation from the black community, which she encounters because she performs for predominantly white audiences, is more difficult to accept:

But normally it hurts me more for a black person to come up to me and say something to me in front of people than it does for a person from another race normally. Because they should be glad to see me there working and they should . . . 'cause if it was me I would say 'I'm glad to see you working.'

What Marshall describes here is a racist attitude on the part of African Americans who adhere to a separatist ideology.

Of the four subjects, only Marshall recognizes racism within the entertainment industry. Of the clubowners in Gates City she contends, "they have these little clans, y'know, where you have to get into the group thing," implying the restrictive and
exclusive nature of the entertainment industry in Gates City. She does not declare outright that the entertainment industry is racist, but refers instead to its exclusiveness. She implies that the club scene is racist by noting she is often the only black person performing in many of the clubs where she plays. Baker, Lady Luscious, and Sure Shot do not mention any problems with racism, and Baker even states, “I've played at most all the clubs in the city and never had a problem with that.”

The theme racism examines the sources of discrimination based on race. Of the bluesqueens interviewed, only Marshall related overt acts of racism, both from the white and black communities. The members of The Gates City Blueswomen denied that they perceived racism from individuals in their audiences or in the entertainment industry. Marshall does not use the term racism with regard to the industry, but she notes the exclusiveness of the club in which she plays, indicating that it caters primarily to white audiences.

Sexism

The blueswomen cite instances of sexism in their performance careers. Interestingly, they do not perceive sexism to be from men. Sexism, in this study, refers to mistreatment and lack of respect the interviewees suffer resulting from their status as women. The type of sexism emphasized by the women includes abuse—both subtle and overt—from women. The bluesqueens allude to sexist treatment from the entertainment industry as well. The codes that emerged for this theme are 1) sexism from women in the audience, and 2) sexism from the entertainment industry.
Baker and Sure Shot, as mentioned earlier, report the malicious and jealous behavior of some female audience members. Baker details three different incidents in which women either threatened her or actually harmed her. The incident noted previously in which the woman accused Marshall of stealing a jacket also is an example of sexist behavior. It is unlikely the white woman would have perceived Marshall as approachable or would have assumed that she would tolerate condescending behavior if Marshall were a man. Lady Luscious does not comment on female audience members.

The bluesqueens also recognize the sexist nature of the entertainment industry. When asked what she thought the entertainment industry's attitude is toward female performers, Marshall comments, “Oh! It's a war. It's a political thing, basically. Yeah, you have to just kindof have to have an attitude.” The term politics refers to the mistreatment that befalls female performers from a white institution, the entertainment industry. Politics also refers to the fact that no agent or manager represents her, which puts her at a disadvantage in the Gates City music scene. She resists becoming part of the “political thing” by being “straight up with 'em” and not becoming involved in the politics.

Lady Luscious also recognizes the sexism that pervades the entertainment industry, especially in blues. Luscious speaks about the fact that Gates City has never had an all-blueswomen show before and that normally “you have male entertainers and then one lady might come out and open up.” The blues scene in Gates City is male dominated. Baker and Sure Shot do not comment on the issue.
The sexism theme describes issues of discrimination based upon biological sex. When noted in the interviews, sexism generally arises from female audience members. A more traditional attitude of sexism, however, also is evident in club owners' attitudes toward female blues singers.

Classism

The theme of classism emerged more subtly in the interviews, but was evident from the interviewees' discussion of their personal experiences and their status as unrepresented musicians in the entertainment industry. Classism, for this study, is defined as not just being poor, but as the lack of financial support from both the community and the entertainment industry. Their discussions of beginning their careers with nothing and lacking representation by agents or managers support the notion that classism effects their careers, even though they do not acknowledge it as such. Only one interviewee discusses her class status in relationship to a social hierarchy (of which she is the bottom) and describes to some degree her place on it. Two subcodes emerged from the data: 1) lack of resources as artists, and 2) lack of financial support from community and society.

When describing her humble beginnings, Sure Shot remembers that the gospel group with which she toured squeezed twelve people into one Volkswagen. It can be assumed that the young, black group made little money, otherwise there would be no need to fit the entire group in a single automobile. Marshall realizes that she is often the only black person at the clubs where she performs. This statement relates to racial issues
as well as issues of class. The individuals from Marshall’s community (i.e., black and poor) do not have the resources to frequent establishments like the club where Marshall’s performs. That the clientele of these clubs is comprised almost exclusively of white people makes a statement about where the blueswomen fit into social hierarchies that involve income. Marshall also recognizes that she has had little support from the entertainment industry. She has managed to gain recognition for her talents without the types of help most successful entertainers have:

You just have to get in there, cause I don't have a backer or an agent or a manager. This--this right here [points to her friend]--we worked together for the last six years. And everything--he's taking care of all my promo stuff and all the stuff, going up to clubs, and doing everything really basically with nothing but . . . with nothing . . . But that's okay when you know you've worked your way and you don't have somebody else that owns you. But now we've come a pretty good distance. Without a agent.

Because black artists generally have fewer resources to draw upon, they cannot afford agents and managers. As a result of being unable to pay for representation, they are less likely to obtain higher-paying engagements. Subsequently, this system reinforces the classism inherent in American social structures; it assures that poorer artists will remain poor and unrepresented.

The code lack of financial support from community and society emerged only in Marshall’s interview. Marshall recognizes the class status of her young life in her
explanation of growing up poor and raising her brothers and sisters. She also raised her two daughters without any help from the government or the children's father: “No welfare, no food stamps, no child support.” Due to the lack of financial support she has received in the past, she has learned to rely on her own minimal resources. She states that if she is remembered for anything, she hopes it will be for giving love because “I didn’t have anything else [to give],” implying that as a poor, African American woman, she lacked the resources to help others financially. Her only asset is the love she has to offer.

The theme classism manifests in diverse ways in the interviews. Classism refers to the blueswomens' depressed economic state both in the past and in the present. The term also recognizes that they lack the financial support more readily available to artists that do not suffer from multiple jeopardy. Though issues of classism certainly effect their careers, none of the women recognize classism as a force that impacts them in any substantial way.

Audience

This theme accounts for the way the interviewees conceptualize the crowds for which they sing. They discuss who attends their shows, how the audiences respond to their performances, and the types of audiences they prefer. The codes that fall under this theme are 1) validation and empathy, 2) disconfirmation, 3) diversity of audience, and 4) white audience.

The code that emerged most often when the blueswomen discussed audiences was validation and empathy. Validation and empathy are feelings of emotional support and
enthusiasm that audiences express to the bluesqueens during performances. Sure Shot asserts that she prefers older crowds to younger crowds because they “appreciate you more.” She likes to look out into the audience and notice people interested in her performance and music. Lady Luscious describes her audiences as enjoying themselves, feeling happy, and getting into the performance, which, in turn, “inspires” and affirms her. Baker explains that one of her best performance experiences was a gospel performance in Finland. During the performance the audience validated her by communicating their understanding of the spiritual nature of the songs. The reason she says it so memorable is because “it was a very good spiritual audience. It was a big inspiration to me.” To Marshall, the best audience is one that validates her by “feeling what I feel. And you can tell, you know. And they just do it—they get excited . . . You can tell when they feel you and when they don’t.” When her audience responds in an empathetic manner, she receives the validation she identifies as important.

The interviewees also note instances of disconfirmation from their audiences. As mentioned earlier, Baker and Sure Shot recall incidents in which women from the audience made rude comments to them, threatened them physically, or misunderstood the meaning of some elements of their performances (e.g., bragging on their big figures, flirting with men in the audience). In addition, Sure Shot notes that she has performed for crowds that sat and stared at her. Marshall claims she has not encountered many crowds that disconfirmed or did not respond to her. Lady Luscious does not comment on this topic.
Diversity is a code that denotes the bluesqueens’ descriptions of audiences as having a variety of ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds. All four interviewees note that they have performed for audiences that are ethnically diverse and that the ethnic makeup usually depends upon the particular venue. Although Marshall currently performs in a club that caters primarily to white audiences, she recalls the diversity of her crowds in Louisiana. With regard to a reunion performance with her old band in Louisiana, she says, “We did a reunion there and all the people that I hadn’t seen in years and I mean all the community, like the guy said. The black people, the white people, the gays and lesbians—all—that normally don’t associate with each other and they all came there.”

Baker claims, “I please any kind of crowd. Any crowd.” She claims not to favor an audience of one particular ethnic or social background over another nor does she perceive her crowds to be the same every time. She claims to have played “most all the clubs in Gates City,” suggesting that the different clubs attract different audiences. Lady Luscious and Sure Shot claim that there is a “different crowd” (i.e., different racial makeup) each time they perform, depending on where they perform. When asked directly if their audiences are predominantly African American, Lady Luscious and Sure Shot both contend that their audiences are diverse and that the ethnic mix depends on the type of clubs they play.

While all four bluesqueens appreciate ethnic diversity in audiences, the code “white audience” emerged in Marshall’s interview. Marshall maintains that her current audiences are predominantly white. While she has performed in Louisiana where
audiences are usually diverse, for the last six years she has performed at a club in Gates City where the clientele is almost exclusively comprised of white tourists.

The theme audience refers to the bluesqueens’ comments that describes their audience preferences and typical audience characteristics. The Gates City Blueswomen claim that they perform for a variety of ethnically diverse audiences that respond well to their shows. Marshall, on the other hand, performs almost exclusively for white audiences. All of the bluesqueens discuss the importance of validation and empathy from their audiences, though three also mention instances in which they were disconfirmed by audiences. In addition to validation by their audiences, the four subjects also seek validation by members of the entertainment industry.

Validation as Artists

How the blueswomen perceive themselves in their artistic environment and how they establish themselves in the entertainment industry defines the theme validation as artists. Although this category is closely related to the code “validation and empathy” under the theme audiences, it differs in that the validation refers more specifically to recognition as an artist. The theme acknowledges the “moments” in which the interviewees achieved some measure of recognition for the events in their careers or when they realized the true potential and impact of their performances on audiences and on the music industry. The following codes emerged from this theme: 1) proving oneself, 2) artistic recognition, and 3) validation in the entertainment industry.
The code proving oneself describes the interviewees' need to show others—either in their audiences or in the music industry—that they are capable, original, and creative performers. Marshall speaks about the fact that in order to get performance bookings, she essentially has had to beg to prove her talents: “We—when we got in there I said ‘just give me one chance and if I don’t do good, you won’t have to have me back anymore.’” She also spoke about one of her best performances, singing with a symphony orchestra, which she compares to singing with the heavenly choir. This segment was coded “proving oneself” because her participation in a concert that featured a traditionally white, western style of musical performance was seen by Marshall as acceptance. She felt gratified by the invitation and by the acceptance she experienced from the white music community.

Sure Shot’s comment, “I just walked up and took my place—you know like Tina Turner” in reference to singing in the church choir when she was young, is an example of proving her talents to the community. She also claims that she “really acts her wildest” when she has crowds that do not respond to her. She proves herself to her crowd by saying “You’re looking at me and I’m looking at you. You know. And I really mean YOU.”

Baker acknowledges her worth as an artist by working on her own, independently of the Gates City Blueswomen. She claims she still works under the Texas Blueswomen name. “I’m still Texas Blueswoman Lashunia Baker. That’s who I am.” Lady Luscious makes no comments about proving herself as an artist.
The code artistic recognition pertains to the interviewees' perceptions of being formally acknowledged and appreciated in tangible ways by audiences and the music industry. Sure Shot recalls a performance in Los Angeles in which audience appreciation helped her recognize herself as an important entertainer:

Yeah I was singing Dr. Feel Good and people were taking pictures that I never knew about. And when I went back that following month, people were bringing pictures to me, showing me my actual facial expressions or whatever. And that—that felt so good. And another thing, somebody asked me for my autograph and I'm going like, 'this is for real? Why do you want my autograph?' Cause to me, I was just me. And to them, I was a star.

Marshall remembers a similar incident when she did a reunion performance with her old band in Louisiana. The variety of people who attended the concert overwhelmed her. She recalls “...I got up and I said 'this is like being at your funeral.' I mean you get to see people care about you. You don’t know people’s gonna come to see you. And you get there and see ah—the people waiting for you when you get there.” That people would overlook their differences in order to gather in one place in her honor was a recognition of her status as an artist.

Baker perceived validation and a sense of recognition from the audience in Finland. She also speaks of the early part of her career when she sang with some groups like Eric Jones, Ariel, and C.C. Gill. She gained some recognition by singing with these
groups. Ironically, Lady Luscious does not discuss her recognition; of the four subjects, she has achieved the most notoriety in her career.

Finally, Baker and Marshall speak about being accepted or validated in the entertainment industry. This code refers to the relationship with other performers, with clubowners, or a particular member of the music industry. More specifically, validation in the entertainment industry refers to “making it” in the white system within which the artists must operate. Baker claims she has never had a problem with clubowners, though she says she has played most of the clubs in Gates City. She also states that she has made friends in the business and because of these connections, the Gates City Blueswomen are able to do things such as borrow equipment. Marshall’s description of singing with the “heavenly choir” (i.e., the symphony orchestra) also was coded as validation in the entertainment industry. Undoubtedly, the invitation to sing with the symphony orchestra was an achievement that validated Marshall as an artist. She was allowed, at least temporarily, to step outside the bounds of her normal venues and repertoire and participate in the traditional music of the dominant culture. She felt validated and accepted by the white community and the white entertainment industry. Ironically, these are the same forces that oppress her in her usual venues.

The theme validation as artists describes how the subjects perceive themselves in their artistic environments, including specific performances and as players in the entertainment industry. The women suggest that major performance events are key for
artistic validation, but they also stress the importance of feeling connected with other artists within the community.

Summary

This chapter discusses the results of the coding of the blueswomen’s interviews and biographies. A total of eleven themes, modified by forty-nine codes, emerged from the coding process. The interviewees provided information about a multiplicity of topics, including their backgrounds, their careers, their audiences, and their perceptions about their roles as public performers.

The theme background refers to the comments the bluesqueens make about the important influences, individuals, and events from the past that impact self-perception and performance preferences. The predominant code under this theme is influence of family and church. All three interviewees frequently refer to growing up in musical families and to learning how to sing in church. Three of the women began their careers singing and touring with gospel groups. Two of the women started their singing careers “late in life,” although the exact age at which they started was never mentioned. In addition, the interviewees made a strong connections between gospel and blues music, noting similarities in style, subject matter, and the type of audience. The performers noted significant performers that have influenced their careers, most of whom are women. Finally, Marshall discusses the hard times she has lived through.

The theme identity is characterized by the what the bluesqueens stand for, fight for, respect, and devalue. Self-respect emerged as the dominant code under this theme, as
the blueswomen, both implicitly and explicitly, proclaim their self-worth. With regard to self-respect, the bluesqueens demonstrate a resistance to the elements of the entertainment industry, their audiences, and particular oppressive aspects of their social conditions. They stand up for themselves at times and challenge the standards set down for them by institutions outside of their control. In particular, the Gates City Blueswomen resist traditional standards of beauty by flaunting their full figures at live performances. It is important to note their self-reliance, which comes as a result of having to take responsibility for launching their careers without financial support.

Finally, the women perceive their experiences and beliefs to be strongly tied to Christian values, which, in part, involves helping others and taking responsibility for other peoples’ actions.

The theme meaning of the blues is characterized by the interviewees’ perceptions of the music genre they favor. Most importantly, all interviewees conceptualize the blues as spiritual in nature and recognize its close ties to gospel. In addition, the women claim that singing the blues is an emotional and inspirational experience.

The theme creation of songs refers to the interviewees’ songwriting processes. Although they did not provide much detail about the creative process, they note that they write songs primarily in response to emotion and inspiration they feel, and that sometimes are they are inspired to write by family members.

Performance issues, another theme, accounts for the bluesqueens’ perceptions about the various aspects of live performance. The Gates City Blueswomen discuss their
appearances on stage as big women. All four denote the competitive aspects of being a blues singer and take pride in the fact that blueswomen are a rare commodity. In addition, they discuss for whom they sing, both themselves and their audiences.

Racism, another theme that emerged from the data, refers to instances of discrimination based on race that the bluesqueens explicitly recognize or that is evident from their narratives. Baker, Sure Shot, and Lady Luscious claim they never have encountered racial problems in the entertainment industry. Marshall, on the other hand, cites instances of racism from members of her white audiences and members of the black community. In addition, although she does not overtly claim that racist attitudes pervade the music industry, she points to its exclusive nature.

The theme sexism is characterized by comments about the mistreatment and lack of respect the interviewees suffer resulting from their status as women. Only two sources of sexism were noted. Sexism from women in the audience was alluded to by The Gates City Blueswomen. That sexism exists in the entertainment industry was supported by Marshall’s comments about sexist politics and Lady Luscious’ recognition of the near-nonexistence of blueswomen in her large Texas city.

Classism did not emerge often as a theme from the data. Although it is never mentioned explicitly by any of the interviewees, elements of classism were recognizable in comments the bluesqueens made about not being represented by agents or managers. The theme also was evident in Marshall’s descriptions of having hard times growing up
in a large family, and in her comments about raising two daughters without any assistance.

The theme audience defines the ways the interviewees perceive their crowds and what type of behavior they prefer from their audiences. Most importantly all four blueswomen denote the importance of being validated during live performances and tell stories from their pasts that reinforce this notion. In addition, Marshall recognizes her audiences to be predominantly white, while the Gates City Blueswomen claim that their audiences are diverse.

Finally, the theme validation as artists refers to how the performers conceive of who they are with respect to the music industry. They perceive the need to have acceptance from audiences as well as from the community of artists, and recognize a necessity to prove themselves in their field.

The ten themes that emerged from the data during the coding process were elaborated upon in this chapter. Chapter four reports the results of the coding of the lyrics selected from the bluesqueens’ published material.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS OF LYRICS

Chapter four reports the results of the coding process for the lyrics of songs recorded by the bluesqueens. There are four sections, one for each interviewee. Each section describes the songs selected, the criteria for selection, and a description of each song. In addition, each section reports the themes and codes that emerged from the songs and contains examples from the lyrics that illustrate the emergent themes and codes in the recorded songs. Finally, each section summarizes the dominant themes and codes.

The song lyrics analyzed in this chapter were selected from two sources: A CD released by Lady Luscious, Sure Shot, and Lashunia Baker entitled *The Gates City Blueswomen* (1996), recorded live at a club in Gates City, and an audiocassette released by Bessie Marshall called *Oh Happy Day* (1995). The primary criteria for selecting songs was that the songs be published and accessible. Choosing songs from published sources ensures that the songs have gone through a preselection process by the bluesqueens and, therefore, represent a measure of importance to them as black female artists.

*The Gates City Blueswomen* (1996) recordings are blues and pop standards, many of them previously recorded by famous artists such as Tina Turner and Aretha Franklin. Even though she considers herself a blues singer, Marshall's audiocassette consists of American gospel music classics. Marshall had not recorded or released a blues
audiocassette at the time this study was conducted. Coding gospel lyrics instead of blues
lyrics for Marshall is justified by the fact that historical music research and all four
bluesqueens note the similarities of blues and gospel. Blues scholar Paul Oliver contends
that gospel shares many characteristics with blues as well as the same history in that both
“sprang from similar roots of segregationalism” (191). Both forms are originally rooted
stylistically in traditional African rhythms and call and response techniques and in
spirituals. Many of the themes found in gospel music exemplify those found in the blues;
sometimes gospel is even referred to by artists as “the holy blues” (207). Oliver notes
that many gospel songs, because of their similarity to rhythm and blues, have “entered the
rhythm and blues list” (207). The bluesqueens themselves note the important
interrelationship of the two genres. According to Lady Luscious, “... blues is just like
gospel. It’s just a turn around on gospel. I mean, it’s like being in church one day and
being in the club the next. You get the same audience, so to speak. The same response.”

The lyrics from the selected songs were transcribed from the recordings,
producing eleven pages of data. Lyrics were coded independently of the personal
interviews and the biographies. In coding the songs separately, I hoped to avoid a bias
that might occur if I utilized the codes developed from the initial set of data. An
additional reason for allowing a new set of codes to emerge through separate coding is
my recognition that, as a traditional genre, the blues will yield certain standard themes
that may fall outside the type of information I was trying to obtain through the personal
interviews and the biographies.
While the women spoke of their lives, their strength, and their struggles during the personal interviews and in the biographies, they discuss men, sex, and relationships in the majority of the songs. The themes of the lyrics represent standard themes of female blues music (Carby and Harrison). In the case of Marshall’s gospel audiocassette, she primarily discusses God’s love, which surfaced as a theme during the personal interview, but was by no means the dominant topic of discourse.

A total of thirty-five codes emerged in coding the lyrics of the ten songs. The codes were examined for points of similarity and reduced to fourteen primary themes: 1) relationships, 2) expectations from a man, 3) power, 4) Christianity, 5) feeling/emotion, 6) resistance/rebellion, 7) humor, 8) community/family, 9) truth, 10) advice, 11) status, 12) hard work, 13) play, and 14) hard times. The first four themes contained codes that modified the actual emergent themes; the ten remaining themes were not modified with by codes. Under the theme relationships, the following codes were found: 1) pain, 2) love, 3) sex, 4) cheating, 5) deceived by a man, 7) self-deception, 8) lost love, 9) possessiveness, 10) sacrifice for love/selflessness, 11) commitment. Under the theme expectations from a man three codes emerged: 1) sexual, 2) emotional, and 3) relational. From the theme power seven codes emerged: 1) relinquishing power to a man, 2) man has power, 3) self-empowerment/self-reliance, 4) self-respect, 5) self-control, 6) empowering women/acknowledging women’s experiences, and 7) control over man. The theme Christianity contained the following modifying codes: 1) God’s help, 2) God’s strength, 3) comfort/happiness, 4) death, 5) eternal life, and 6) forgiveness.
Lashunia Baker

Three songs were chosen from Baker recordings on *The Gates City Blueswomen* CD (1996). The songs are “Baby I Love You,” “Misty Blue,” and “Do Right Woman.” I selected these particular songs because they provide a variety of contrasting perceptions about relationships. While “Misty Blue” presents a lamenting and somewhat fragile perception of relationships, “Do Right Woman” invokes a strong-willed and resistant opinion about male-female dynamics. “Baby I Love You” waivers between sacrifice for love and expectations from a man.

The persona in “Misty Blue” grieves a lost love and remembers the way her ex-lover used to make her feel. Throughout the song, every memory she has of her past love, “Turns my whole world misty blue.” She remembers the things they did together, how the mention of his name makes her feel, and the positive ways that he treated her in the relationship. In the middle of the song, she admits she misses the sex as much as anything else when she sings:

> Baby, when I think of the things we used to do  
> Deep in my heart I cry  
> Baby, when I think of the way we used to screw  
> Deep in my heart I cry

Not only are her feelings for him tied up in sex, but in pain as well. At the end of the song she doubts that she will ever forget her old love and states, once again, that this brings her pain, turning her “whole world misty blue.”
In “Do Right Woman,” made popular by Aretha Franklin, the persona remarks not just on her own feelings about a man, but about relationship dynamics and society's impact and influence on relationships. In the first verse, she instructs her man to “Take me to heart.” If he follows through with her request, she promises to love him forever; if he fails by taking her for granted, however, she will fall prey to worry and temptation. She goes on to say that a woman is “just like a man” in her humanness, and that he should try to understand this. The chorus proclaims, “If you want a do right, all-day woman/You gotta be a do right, all-night man,” ordering him to respect her by pleasing her sexually.

The singer expresses a wide range of emotions and thoughts about relationships with men in “Baby I Love You.” The persona repeatedly asserts “I love you,” especially in the chorus, where this statement is repeated five times. She claims that she will give him anything he wants if he just “snaps his little fingers.” Before she would see him “do without,” she would “deny her own self.” After two verses and two choruses dedicated to expressing her devotion to him, she changes the direction of the song by stating she will leave him some day if he does not “explain it” to her. She repeats her love for him, and then orders him to stay with her and to ignore the opinions of the community: “Don’t let your neighbors tell you ‘I don’t want that’/Don’t let your friends tell you ‘I don’t need that’/Don’t let your whole family tell you ‘I don’t want that.’” The persona warns her man that some people will understand their relationship, some will not; however, he must “get down to the real nitty gritty” because this is his “S.O.S.O.S.O.S.O.S.” At the
closing of the song, she affirms, "If you can get it up, baby/I can get it in/Talkin’ about Sex-O-Sex-O-Sex-O-Sex-O-Sex-O," a call for support and an admission of her own needs. At the same time she controls him with sex and thereby asserts her power in the relationship.

Although a wide range of codes emerged from Baker’s three songs, all are concerned with relationship dynamics. Love, a code under the theme relationships, emerged for all three songs. In “Baby I Love You,” the persona reiterates her love for her man throughout the lyrics. In “Misty Blue,” she invokes a past lover and laments the love that died. “Do Right Woman” discusses the love she will give her man forever if he treats her with respect. While the tone of each song varies, all are occupied with expressing feelings and beliefs about romantic relationships.

Sacrifice for love, another code under the theme relationships, surfaced from both “Do Right Woman” and “Baby I Love You.” Both songs explain the degree to which the persona would give up part of her life to in order to be good to her lover. In “Baby I Love You,” the persona asserts, “Oh what you want, little boy you’re gonna get it/I’d deny my own self before I’d see you without it.” She goes on to say he can ask for her loving or kiss her anytime he so desires; to her, it is the least she can do for him. In “Do Right Woman,” the persona discusses sacrificing herself for love, but within certain parameters. She claims she will always love him as long as he does not take her for granted. She states she will be a “do right all day woman” if he is good to her all night long.
Self-respect, a code under the theme power, was evident in both "Baby I Love You" and "Do Right Woman." According to the persona in "Baby I Love You," she will run away from her man if he does not explain himself to her. She feels she deserves for him to "get on down to the real nitty gritty" with her if she is going to love him. Although she is quite willing to make sacrifices for love, she also expects him to be honest with her and, in this way, respect her. In "Do Right Woman," the persona acknowledges her humanness and her desire to be treated compassionately by reminding her man that a woman is "flesh and blood, just like a man." She represents a strong, willful human being, not a "plaything" for a man. While she mandates respect for herself, her statements empower women as well. This code empowering women emerged as important because she does not just affirm "I am not a plaything;" she implies that her entire sex does not exist for the pleasure of men. In fact, men exist for women's pleasure.

Closely related to the theme of power and the code self-respect is the theme expectations from a man, particularly the codes sexual expectations from a man and relational expectations from a man. Both of these codes emerged in the analysis of "Baby I Love You" and "Do Right Woman." In "Baby I Love You," the singer expects her man to "explain it to her." Although what this statement means is never clarified within the lyrics, it has obvious importance to the persona. She also expects him to ignore the advice of his friends, family, and "folks." In "Do Right Woman," the expectations are sexual and relational. They are sexual in that the chorus stresses the importance of him treating her right all night long. She also demands that he show respect for her if he
wants the relationship to continue: “And as long as we’re together baby/Show some respect for me.” In this statement she validates herself as a woman and states her expectations with regard to their relationship. She seems to be quite willing to end the relationship if he cannot meet her expectations. In doing so, she asserts her power.

The lyrics from all three songs bring up sex, a code under the theme relationships, but each considers it from a different angle. “Do Right Woman” presents sex as something in which the persona engages only if she is treated with respect from her lover, while “Misty Blue” ponders past romantic relationships and fulfilling, remembered sex. In “Baby I Love You” the persona requests sex from her man to appease her and challenges him by assuring him if he can get an erection, she can handle the rest.

From “Misty Blue,” the themes expectations from a man, self-respect and power, are conspicuously absent; the song only considers what the persona has lost. She laments the past and feels wounded from the entire experience in the present. The relationship theme in this song emerged in the codes pain and lost love. Examples of these codes are obvious in lines such as “Just the thought of you/Makes my whole world turn misty blue,” and “Just the mention of your name/Turns the flicker into a flame.” She feels overwhelming grief and suffers greatly simply from having a thought of him or from hearing his name.

Finally, the theme community and family was invoked in “Baby I Love You,” and the theme rebellion and resistance against the standards of the community was invoked in “Do Right Woman.” In “Baby I Love You,” the persona asserts “Don’t let your low-
down friends tell you ‘I don’t need that’/Don’t let your whole family tell you ‘I don’t want that,” invoking the community of which they are both a part. The community, according to the song, impacts individuals’ opinions and influences their decisions. The persona calls for her man to make an exception to listening to the community and make up his own mind. In “Do Right Woman,” the persona claims, “They say it’s a man’s world/But you can’t prove that by me,” thereby rejecting society’s beliefs about a woman’s role in relationships, in her community, and in the world.

Twelve total codes emerged in the coding of songs by Baker representing six themes. The themes represented in Baker’s songs are: 1) relationships, 2) power, 3) expectations from a man, 4) community and family, 5) feeling and emotion, and 6) rebellion and resistance. The relationship theme was most prominent in the songs and accounted for five codes, noted here from most common to least common: 1) love, 2) sacrifice for love, 3) sex, 4) commitment, and 5) pain. The themes of power and expectations from a man were each represented by two codes in the songs. Power emerged in the codes self-respect and empowering women; expectations from a man emerged as sexual expectations from a man and relational expectations from a man. The themes community and family, rebellion/resistance, and feeling and emotion also appeared in the coding. Of these three themes, community and family were in evidence more often, usually in connection with rebellion/resistance. Feeling and emotion was the least prominent of the themes coded in Baker’s songs.
In the songs that Baker sings, relationships are the primary theme. The code love, in particular, predominates. The persona in each song concerns herself with loving a man and the repercussions of this love. In addition to love, the personae of the songs demonstrate their willingness to sacrifice themselves for their men and their relationships, including refuting the advice of family and friends. At the same time, various elements of self-respect and empowering women appear as well. The codes sexual and relational expectations from a man emerge, as she asks her man to show her respect and treat her right in bed. All three songs deal with the issue of sex, even though the personae approach the subject from various points of view, ranging from lamenting and submissive to open and demanding. The different perceptions of relationships each persona presents in the songs provide a contrast in the conceptualization of love and women's roles therein.

Sure Shot

Three songs performed by Sure Shot were selected from The Gates City Blueswomen (1996) CD for coding. The songs are “Tonight’s the Night,” “Just a Little Bit,” and “Dr. Feel Good.” The lyrics of these three songs reveal the broad range of subjects that Sure Shot considers in her performances and were the only three songs that she sang by herself on the Gates City Blueswomen’s CD. Each creates a different picture of how the persona defines herself and how she perceives love and sex.

“Tonight’s the Night” is the story of a young woman (the persona) losing her virginity. She discusses the full range of possibilities for the night and her expectations
for making love for the first time. She claims, “I’m nervous and I’m tremblin’/I’m waiting
for you to walk in/Trying hard to relax, but I just can’t keep still.” She describes what
would happen if her “mama should come home early” and discusses her fears of being
captured in the sex act and her whole family finding out about this important event. She
ends the song repeating a triumphant and willing, “I love you, I know it/I ain’t to proud to
show it.” In her eyes, her lover has the power to transform her into something new and
beautiful. She asserts, “Tonight is the night/That you make me a woman.”

“Just a Little Bit” is a repetitive number in which the persona claims she does not
want much, just a little. All she wants is “a teeny weeny bit, just a eeny weeny bit of
your love.” Humor compels the song, in that she proclaims how little she wants again
and again. In the middle of the song she repeats, “Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a
minute, wait a minute,” rethinking her proposition. But then she ends the song with “Just
a teeny weeny bit, just a eeny weeny bit of your love.”

“Dr. Feel Good,” originally recorded by Aretha Franklin, tells of the persona’s
tales with sex, of her man (Dr. Feel Good), and of other people attempting to
interfere in their relationship. She claims she does not want anyone sitting around,
watching the two of them. She would even go so far as to find someone to occupy her
family and friends in order to secure their privacy. In the chorus, she claims she only
needs Dr. Feel Good to make her happy: “Don’t send me no doctor/Fillin’ me up with all
those pills/ Got me a man named Dr. Feel Good.” Throughout the song she identifies the
way that her family and community interfere with her sex life with Dr. Feel Good. Even
her girlfriend needs to disappear because she has no time to “To sit, and chit, and sit, and chit chat and smile” when Feel Good is around. In the chorus and again at the end of the song, she claims if someone takes even one trip to Dr. Feel Good, they will understand his magic. Referring to his sexual prowess, she concludes, “You’ll understand why Feel Good is his name.”

Sex, a code under the theme relationships, was predominant in all three of Sure Shot’s songs. In “Tonight’s the Night,” the narrator loses her virginity and thinks about what her man means to her. In “Just a Little Bit,” the persona talks about “turning the lights down low” and wanting a teeny bit of her lover’s love. In “Dr. Feel Good,” she talks about the necessity of being with Feel Good without the interference of family and friends so he can make her feel better and get rid of “all those pains in my head.” Each song approaches sex from a different angle—-one from a virgin's perspective, one from a humorous perspective that puts the persona in control of the sexual situation and playfully humiliates her man, and one in which she must have sex with her lover and the lengths that she will go to in order to accomplish this goal.

Another prominent theme that emerged from the songs was expectations from a man. The code sexual expectations from a man was evident in all three songs. The virgin from “Tonight’s the Night” wants her man to be gentle with her and make her “feel real good.” In the other two songs she affirms she wants her man to love her and give her what she needs, which is “good lovin’.” In “Just a Little Bit,” the code emotional expectations from a man was coded simultaneously with sexual expectations. The
persona's request for “love” refers to her need for attention and emotional affection in addition to sex.

Another important theme, humor, also is evident in all three songs. Whether the words are dramatic and sappy, as they are in “Tonight's the Night,” or playful and raunchy, as they are in “Just a Little Bit” and “Dr. Feel Good,” each persona humiliates her man in some way by claiming that he is not man enough to keep her personally satisfied. In “Just a Little Bit,” the persona simultaneously declares that she wants very little from her man and insinuates that her lover is incapable of giving her much love, just “a teeny weeny bit, just a eeny weeny bit.”

The theme community and family emerged in “Tonight's the Night” and “Dr. Feel Good.” In “Tonight's the Night,” the persona talks about her fear of her whole family discovering that she lost her virginity and the trouble she would get into if her mama caught them in the act. She claims she would “never live it down.” In “Dr. Feel Good” the persona talks about wanting her friends and family to leave her alone when she is with her man. Even her good friend has to leave when she and her man “get to lovin.” In both cases the family and/or the community pose a threat to the sexual fulfillment of the persona. Family is obviously important to the persona in “Tonight's the Night,” but she is willing to reject their standards for sex and for the transformation she believes will come with the sexual act. The persona in “Dr. Feel Good,” on the other hand, is more of a sexual outlaw. She readily rejects family and friends, as well as their approval, to attain sexual fulfillment.
Additionally, the code possessiveness, under the theme relationships, emerged from “Dr. Feel Good.” The persona claims Feel Good as her own and declares that when she is with him no one else may be around him. These claims are evidence of a sense of ownership. Although she says elsewhere in the song that others would understand if they were ever with him, her attitudes about others being around is evidence that she has no intention of letting any other woman occupy her position in his affections. The codes self-respect and self-control are evident briefly in “Just a Little Bit.” The passage where the persona repeats “wait a minute” eight times suggests an attempt to gain control, and thereby, self-respect. She quickly abandons these thoughts, however, in favor of her desires.

The code relinquishing power to a man, under the theme power, is evidenced in “Tonight's the Night.” The persona relinquishes to her man one of the most important possessions she has--her virginity. The persona leaves it up to her lover to treat her gently and “make her a woman” on this night of nights.

Nine codes emerged in coding the songs by Sure Shot. The nine codes represent five themes: 1) relationships, 2) expectations from a man, 3) humor, 4) community and family, and 5) power. The relationship theme was most prominent in the songs and was represented most often by the code sex, which was present in all three songs. The code possessiveness, under the theme relationships, was strongly present in one song, but did not appear in the other two. Expectations from a man was the second most common theme and was manifest primarily in the code sexual expectations, which appeared in all
three songs. Emotional expectations also emerged as a code for this theme, but appeared in only one of the three songs. The theme humor, which is a code in its own right, also was evident in all three songs. The theme community and family emerged from two of the three songs, but appeared in a different manner in each. Whereas one persona demonstrates concern about what her family will think if she goes against their standards, the other willfully rejects both family and community. Finally, the theme power is represented by three codes: 1) relinquishing power to a man, 2) self-respect, and 3) self-control. The personae in each song relinquishes power to men for the sake of sex. As codes, self-respect and self-control appear almost as an aside in a single song, where the persona decides to forgo these qualities for the sake of sex.

The coding for Sure Shot’s lyrics closely resembles that of Baker’s in that the predominant theme that emerged was relationships. More specifically, the code sex clearly dominated the songs. The personae make demands on their men that they expect to be met. In many instances, the personae make their demands in a way that subtly humiliates their men and has a humorous effect. Similar to Baker’s songs, Sure Shot’s songs reflect an inconsistency with regard to the perception of women’s roles in relationships and with issues regarding sex and power.

Lady Luscious

Three songs performed by Lady Luscious were selected from The Gates City
Blueswomen (1996) CD for coding: “Damn Your Eyes,” “If Loving You Is Wrong,” and “Right Arm for Your Love.” All three songs consider love and sacrifice for men and
relationships, but contain inconsistencies about the perceptions of the personae’s roles in relationships. The persona in each song questions her motives for staying in a particular relationship thereby asserting her self-worth, while at the same time affirming the value she places on men, sex, and love.

"Damn Your Eyes" reflects on the persona’s frustration with her inability to fall out of love with her ex-lover. She begins the song with the wistful “I can do what I want/I’m in complete control/That’s what I tell myself.” The song transforms gradually from this attempt to respect herself and take control of her life to a state of mind in which she gives up all ideas about leaving her man because with one look, she is “put under his spell.” The chorus voices the ultimate frustration and disappointment:

Damn your eyes
For taking my breath away
Damn your eyes
For making me want to stay
Damn your eyes
For getting my hopes up high
For making me fall in love again
Damn your eyes

In “If Loving You Is Wrong,” the persona expresses the duality of her thoughts about having an affair with a married man. She claims, “If loving you is wrong, I don’t want to be right.” She reports the negative, disapproving opinions of her family members
and friends about her love affair and she retorts that their opinions do not matter. The situation is described more fully when she reveals that she knows he has a wife and “two little children/Depending on you.” In the end, although she admits she probably is wrong to be in love with a married man, she is unwilling to let him go because he is the best thing that has ever happened to her.

In an aside to her audience during “If Loving You Is Wrong,” Luscious admits “Yes, cheatin’ is a risky business. But I just keep on takin' what I have, cause it's good.” She talks about her past and the things she used to do, but claims she does not have to engage in that kind of behavior anymore. Before returning to the song, she gives advice to women about how to keep their men:

You see, I used to be a cheatin’ woman, but now I got me a housekeeper and I don’t have to do that anymore. So I can linger on. Today I was talkin’ to Sage on the phone and told her “I can let my boat go down the river, and tug it back up when I get ready for it. It ain’t every woman that can do that.” Because women need to learn the assets they have to give out to a man. If you don’t know what you got to offer, hell—you can’t keep your man!

The spoken aside is a curious phenomenon in recorded music. In this instance, the singer drops the persona she has adopted for the song in order to address the audience in her own person. In this aside, Lady Luscious, after initially asserting her similarity to the persona, distances herself from the persona, claiming that she no longer engages in
such behavior. She also attempts to align herself with the women in the audience by offering them advice on keeping their men. The essence of her advice is a challenge for the women to recognize their own “assets.” Interestingly, this is a call for women to recognize their own self-worth. Ironically, the advice encourages them to define themselves in relation to how well they can hold on to a man, as if a woman only has an identity if she is yoked to a man either as a spouse or a lover.

After this aside the persona proclaims, once again, her intent to love her man despite the immoral nature of the behavior and the potential consequences. She resolves not to concern herself with “being right.”

In “Right Arm for Your Love,” the persona explains that she would sacrifice herself for her lover, even chop off her right arm for him. The song describes the strong love between the persona and her man, one in which they have both “grown strong, through pain and strife.” She speaks of her love for him and explains she would do anything for him. The chorus reiterates her commitment, “Bop do wap/Baby I’ll chop/Off my right arm for your love.” She claims he is the best man around and she loves to have sex with him and spend time with him. He has her heart and her mind . . . and, in her words, he can “come get the rest.” She ends the song by pronouncing she would do anything for him, as long as he is good to her.

All three songs exhibit the code sacrifice for love, which falls under the theme relationships. Sacrifice for love is evident from “Damn Your Eyes” when the persona sings, “You say that you’ll change/It’s always the same, but you never do/I believe all
your lies.” She recognizes that she will continue to love him, despite the things he does to her. Consequently, she will sacrifice some of the self-respect she tried to establish at the beginning of the song. In “If Loving You Is Wrong,” the persona claims she will disregard her friends' and family's advice and will continue to love him despite the consequences. She claims, “But as long as I got you/By my side/I don't care what people say.” The persona states her willingness to ignore the opinions of and to sacrifice the respect of her friends and family to be with her lover. Finally, from “Right Arm for Your Love,” the persona reiterates she would do “anything” for her lover, including chopping off her right arm. While the lyrics are humorous, they support the notion of sacrifice in that she boasts about her man—”Brother Wright Washington copied you”—and promises to be with him when they are “old and gray.” By saying she would chop off her right arm for him, she humorously proclaims the lengths to which she will go to be with him. When recognized as a metaphor, chopping off the right arm, acquires some weight. The persona says, in essence, that she is willing to sacrifice parts of her self for the sake of a man.

Several codes under the theme of power were evident from the coding. An odd combination of self-respect and self-control emerged along with a struggle to yield to the powers of love or, more specifically, relationships with men. The code relinquishing power to a man manifested in all three songs. “Damn Your Eyes” discusses how the persona allows her man to have power over her and continually deceive her. She is “put under his spell,” despite the fact that she knows he lies to her and hurts her. It is as if she
participates in her own victimization yet, because she is cognizant of her behavior, 
maintains a certain amount of power. In the aside from “If Loving You Is Wrong,” Lady 
Luscious remarks that in order for women to keep their men, they have to learn the 
“assets they have to give out to a man.” This statement calls women to recognize their 
own power. In making this statement, however, she affirms the necessary reliance of 
women on men and the degree to which women define themselves by how well they are 
able to please a man. The persona in “Right Arm for Your Love” speaks of doing 
anything for her man. With this statement, she reveals her willingness to allow him to 
dictate the way she lives and the way she defines her self.

While the personae in all three songs discuss giving up power to a man in a 
relationship, even unhealthy relationships, they do not relinquish their power without 
some degree of uncertainty. The codes self-control, self-respect, and self-empowerment 
were equally consequential in the lyrics. For example, in “Damn Your Eyes,” the 
personae attempts to convince herself that she is in “complete control” and will “be all 
right all alone.” Indeed the chorus, despite its wistful overtones, articulates a frustration 
with not being able to respect herself and leave him because he is “taking her breath 
away” with the look in his eyes. She is incapable of giving up sex and love with him, but 
she is both aware of and frustrated with her own weaknesses. Consequently, she is 
powerless, but recognizes her own willingness to relinquish power to her man.

Despite the fact that she advises women about how to keep their men in her aside, 
Lady Luscious demonstrates self-respect by boasting about her sexual abilities. Self-
respect is exemplified in the line about letting her boat go down the river and tugging it back up when she gets ready for it, establishing that she has ultimate control in sexual contexts. She also boasts of her status by informing her audience that “I got me a housekeeper,” which allows her to “linger on” if she wants to. Elements of self-control, self-respect and self-empowerment are identifiable from the aside.

Closely related to relinquishing power to a man, a code under the power theme, and sacrifice for love, a code under the relationship theme, are two other codes under the theme of relationships, deceived by a man and self deception. The persona in “If Loving You Is Wrong” speculates about whether her man is deceiving her or whether she is deceiving herself:

I believe all your lies, I look in your eyes
You make it all seem true
I guess I see what I want to see
Or is my heart deceiving me?

She is unsure whom to blame. Certainly she knows that he lies and is deceiving her. Yet, she actively chooses to believe the lies, consequently deceiving herself. She reports that her friends think she is deceiving herself: “My friends tell me there’s no future/In loving a married man.” She continues by stating, “I guess I’m wrong to be in love with a married man/I know I’m wrong to hold on to the best thing I ever had,” affirming that because of the complexity of her emotions she is misleading herself in this situation.
Finally, the theme community/family emerged as important from the lyrics of "If Loving You Is Wrong." The persona creates a context for her declaration of sacrifice to her lover by involving the opinions of her friends and family: "Mama and Daddy say it's a shame/It's a downright disgrace." Her friends confirm she has no future with a married man, but she renounces all opinions to demonstrate her commitment. Obviously the community around her impacts her decisions; in this case, however, she listens to her friends and family, but ultimately rejects their advice.

The theme humor was coded for the aside in "If Loving You Is Wrong" in which Luscious discusses cheating, sex and "draining him for every drop he's got so he can't take it nowhere else." Clearly she attempts to advise women, but with a raunchy and humorous approach so that they will appreciate the entertainment element of her message as well. Humor surfaced again in "Right Arm for Your Love" where, in the chorus, she discusses cutting off body parts for her lover. The emphasis in the chorus is on the rhyme "wap" and "chop," which reinforces the outrageousness of the offer and underscores the humorous nature of the offer.

Three themes that surfaced but occurred only once are status, advice, and feeling and emotion. From the aside spoken by Lady Luscious in "If Loving You Is Wrong," she asserts her status, claiming now that she has a housekeeper, she can linger on. She distinguishes between herself and individuals who cannot afford this luxury. "Advice" emerged from the aside in "If Loving You Is Wrong" in that Lady Luscious tells women how to keep their men. She tells the women in the audience to "drain him for every drop
he's got so he can't take it nowhere else.” The theme feeling and emotion surfaced in “Right Arm for Your Love.” The persona fondly recalls that her man has been an inspiration to her through the years and that the two of them have grown strong together.

Similar to the lyrics of Baker and Sure Shot, Lady Luscious’ songs primarily concern themselves with romantic relationships and illustrate an interesting mixture of self-respect, sacrifice, pain, humor, and power issues between men and women. Fifteen codes emerged in coding the songs Lady Luscious performed. The fifteen codes represent seven themes: 1) relationships, 2) power, 3) humor, 4) community/family, 5) status, 6) advice, and 7) feeling and emotion. As with the recordings by the two previous singers, relationships was the most prominent theme coded. Six different codes under the relationship theme emerged: 1) sacrifice for love, 2) self-deception, 3) deceived by a man, 4) cheating, 5) commitment, and 6) love. Although the code sacrifice for love appeared most often, it is interesting to note that the code self-deception occurred more frequently than the code deceived by a man. The personae in these songs recognize their own participation in acts of deception and actively question themselves about their behavior, whether they feel powerless to break out of the cycle or recognize it and actively choose to accept it. Another interesting finding is the prominence of the theme power in this collection of songs. The theme power emerged in four codes: 1) self-respect, 2) self-control, 3) self-empowerment, and 4) relinquishing power to a man. The code sacrifice for love under the theme of relationships was the single most frequently occurring code in Lady Luscious' songs. The four codes under the theme of power
ranked second, third, fourth, and fifth in frequency. Therefore, although codes under the theme of relationships were dominant, they were strongly modified by power themes. And, even though one of the codes under the power theme involves relinquishing power to a man, the personae in this group of songs recognize that they have power should they choose to exercise it.

Humor, as a theme, appeared in two songs. In “If Loving You Is Wrong,” the humor occurs not in the song itself, but in the aside spoken by Lady Luscious. In “Right Arm for Your Love,” the humor emerges in the outrageous nature of the lengths to which the persona is willing to go for the love of her man and in the chorus where the rhyming “wap” and “chop” suggest the act of chopping.

The community/family theme appeared in only one of the three songs, though its presence is strong as the persona struggles with choosing between the standards of family and friends and the man that she loves. The theme status appears only once and relates to the persona’s ability to be with her man as a result of her status. The theme advice appears once in the aside in “If Loving You Is Wrong” when Lady Luscious explains to the women how to keep their men by pleasing them sexually. Finally, the theme feeling and emotion appears once in “Right Arm for Your Love” when Lady Luscious describes the beautiful relationship of which she has been a part for many years. When comparing the viewpoints about love, the songs demonstrate a contrast in the way in which the personae of the songs understand love and the roles that women and men play in romantic relationships.
The Gates City Blueswomen

The Gates City Blueswomen, which consists of Baker, Sure Shot, and Lady Luscious, recorded one song together on their self-titled CD. This song was coded in addition to the ones in which they sang individually because it provided a text that represents all three female performers with one "voice," so to speak. "Proud Mary," written by Creedence Clearwater Revival and made popular by Tina Turner, appears as the last song on their CD.

Lady Luscious begins the song while the band plays the "Proud Mary" melody in the background softly and slowly. She says:

You know, every night and day, we like to do something nice, and kinda slow, easy y'know. But to tell you the truth, we're not those kind of girls--we're not nice at all. So right now we're gonna throw three tons of fun at you and hope you can hold on. Cause we're rollin'...

At this point, Sure Shot and Baker join Lady Luscious for the chorus, "rollin' on a river." The song, with which most audiences are familiar, discusses the boat Proud Mary and the persona's journeys on this "river boat dream." The blueswomen sing about hard labor in the city, "Working for a man every night and day." The song continues to discuss working in Memphis, spending money in New Orleans, and then discovering the beauty and the fun of a city after seeing it from a boat on the river.

The major themes evident in this song are hard work, resistance/rebellion, and play. The opening lines after the chorus, "Left a good job in the city/Working for a man
every night and day,” establish the singers’ hard work in the past, and their rejection of that hard work for “play.” Hard work also is discussed when Memphis is mentioned, but immediately following that the persona tells that “I dropped a lot of change down in New Orleans,” reaffirming the importance of play and amusement.

The spoken introduction to the song by Lady Luscious reveals the codes resistance/rebellion and humor. She speaks on the others’ behalf claiming they are not nice girls and warning the audience of what is to come. Lady Luscious assumes that the audience expects a nice, slow remake of an oldie and rebels against their expectations. By using humor (e.g., the comment about their weight being “thrown” at the crowd and the assertion of their bawdiness) she rejects traditional societal biases based in sexism, racism, and American beauty standards.

Three major codes emerged from the lyrics: 1) hard work, 2) resistance/rebellion, and 3) humor. “Proud Mary” was included in the coding process because the three members of the Gates City Blueswomen unite to perform. The unity strengthens the meaning of the song in that all three agree to perform it and engage in making it both lively and original.

Bessie Marshall

Three songs were coded from Marshall’s audiocassette Oh Happy Day (1995) for coding. Gospel lyrics were selected because they were the only source of published material from Marshall. She has not recorded, to this point, a blues audiocassette. While the audiocassette contains no blues songs, Marshall considers herself a blues artist. She
sings blues in a bar in Gates City six nights a week and has done so for the past six years. Prior to that she sang blues for over ten years in Louisiana. Marshall has also sung gospel at the same club every Sunday morning for the past six years.

The similarities between gospel and blues music, as mentioned in the methodology and the beginning of this chapter, are great enough as to warrant analyzing gospel lyrics. Both the research and the bluesqueens themselves note the similarities of the two genres. That the lyrics come from published material is an important criteria in that it demonstrates the importance of the pre-selection process and the honing of the song in performance before they are released on a CD or audiocassette. Clearly, the results of the coding for gospel lyrics will yield different codes than those of the other songs; Marshall's songs, nevertheless, demonstrate themes found in the coding of the interviews and biographies. She recorded the audiocassette with her current band and no other singers accompany her.

The audiocassette consists of gospel classics, and the three songs chosen for the coding were "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," "Swing Low," and "Oh Happy Day." These three songs were chosen because they emphasize the difficulty of this life and the anticipated joy of the afterlife that is to follow. Although the themes differ from those that emerged in the songs of the other three singers, the songs contain themes common to blues in their consideration of the tribulations of life on Earth and in their recognition of another, better place where people who suffered in this life will be rewarded for their
faithfulness in the face of the injustices and indignities visited upon them. The songs address spiritual matters from a Christian perspective.

"Will the Circle Be Unbroken" describes the funeral of the persona's mother and discusses how much the persona will miss her. Intermixed with the story of the funeral is the realization that there is a "better home awaiting/In the sky, Lord, in the sky." She directly addresses the undertaker and orders him to drive slowly because "this lady that you're hauling/Lord I hate to see her go." In the final verse she claims she will follow closely behind her mother and obtain salvation from God; she expresses that she "could not hold her sorrow" when they lay her mother in the grave.

"Swing Low" is a gospel classic in which the persona describes death and the chariot that sweeps down from heaven to carry souls home to God. She claims she looked toward Jordan and saw her archangel coming to carry her home to heaven. The final verse, a message to a friend or anyone who may get to heaven before her, explains "tell all three" (the Holy Trinity) that "he" (the archangel) is coming to carry her to heaven as well.

The third song coded from Marshall's gospel audiocassette is the simple and repetitive "Oh Happy Day." The lyrics express the singer's joyous state, which is the result of having her sins washed clean by Jesus. The one actual verse describes what Jesus has done for her, which is "taught me how to fight and pray," and she proclaims she is "rejoicing every day." The chorus expresses the joy of being a Christian:
Oh happy day
Oh happy day
When Jesus washed
When Jesus washed
My sins away
Oh happy day
Oh happy day
Oh happy day

The song repeats “Oh Happy Day” again and again, reaffirming the subject of the song—the joy of being a Christian.

Unlike the Gates City Blueswomen’s CD, which primarily discusses the dynamics and hardships of relationships, Marshall’s lyrics address Christian beliefs and values. The predominant codes under the theme Christianity were death and eternal life. In “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” she describes her mother’s funeral and her emotions during the event. While she is saddened by her mother’s death, she recognizes that the Christian version of afterlife is the “better home awaiting in the sky,” (i.e., heaven). She is then comforted by her belief in eternal life. “Swing Low” reinforces the Christian belief in heaven after death. When she dies, she will be carried from earth to heaven in a “sweet chariot.” Although “Oh Happy Day” does not discuss death, it emphasizes the notion of eternal life, in that if a Christian’s sins are “washed away” by Jesus, s/he will go to heaven after life on Earth.
Comfort emerged as an important code from Marshall's lyrics. Comfort was closely related to eternal life, specifically in the belief that eternal life brings the persona joy and relief. For instance, in discussing her sadness about her mother's death, she is comforted by the fact that her mother is going to heaven. She feels soothed knowing she is going to heaven in a chariot after her life is over, and gets great comfort from being able to "fight and pray" and great joy knowing her sins are washed clean. At the end of "Swing Low," Marshall sings in an aside, "I'm sometimes up, sometimes down," an indication of "hard times" and earthly suffering. This statement is followed by "coming for to carry me home," which indicates the consolation she feels when she considers the afterlife. Similarly, in "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," the persona discusses both hard times and pain at the death of her mother, but at the end affirms the consolation she feels knowing there is a better home waiting for her "in the sky."

Emotion/feeling surfaced from the songs, as the lyrics deal with topics that are very serious: life, death, afterlife, and prayer. The persona cannot "hold her sorrow" in "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" and cannot suppress her joy in "Oh Happy Day." Another code that surfaced in all three songs is "God's power/strength," which is closely related to "comfort." The singer feels a sense of awe at her state of grace, being forgiven by God for her sins and able to go to heaven. To proclaim God's power seems to be the purpose of the songs.

Nine codes representing four themes emerged in the coding of songs by Marshall. The themes represented in Marshall's songs are: 1) Christianity, 2) feeling/emotion, 3)
pain, and 4) hard times. The Christianity theme was most prominent in the songs and accounted for six codes, noted here from most common to least common: 1) death, 2) God's strength, 3) comfort/happiness, 4) eternal life, 5) God's help, and 6) forgiveness from God. The code death predominates. The personae in the songs "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" and "Swing Low" concern themselves with both their own and others' deaths. Each song, however, contains the code eternal life that serves to glorify death in that it provides the personae with relief from this difficult life. Comfort/happiness is closely tied to the code eternal life, in that in all cases where eternal life is mentioned, the personae feel soothed. God's strength was a prominent code that refers to the power God has to grant salvation, wash away sins, and make people strong. God's help and God's forgiveness appeared, although not as frequently, when the personae describe the attributes of the Christian God that make their lives more bearable.

The theme feeling and emotion occurred in all songs. Feeling and emotion manifested differently in the songs. For example, in "Will the Circle Be Unbroken," the persona is sad as she contemplates her mother's death, while in "Oh Happy Day" the persona speaks of "rejoicing." The theme pain only occurred in "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" as the persona expresses intense sadness about the sufferings of this life, namely the death of her mother. Lastly, the theme hard times appears in "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" in the description of the death of the persona's mother, and in "Swing Low," when Marshall sings "I'm sometimes up, sometimes down" as the song is fading.
All three songs deal with not only religious issues, but pain and difficulties of life as well, themes common to both blues and gospel.

Summary

This chapter discussed the results of the coding of the interviewees' selected lyrics. The thirty-four codes that emerged from the songs were examined for areas of commonality and reduced to thirteen major themes. While the coding of the lyrics for the members of the Gates City Blueswomen was somewhat consistent among the three, the coding that resulted from Marshall's lyrics was unique. This difference was due to the fact that Marshall's audiocassette contains only gospel music. The predominant theme that recurred in the Gates City Blueswomen's songs was relationships, whereas the predominant theme from Marshall's songs was Christianity. While there is overlap in the themes and codes that emerged from the lyrics of Baker, Sure Shot, and Lady Luscious, there are few similarities to be drawn between the lyrics of Marshall and the other three. What the patterns of the codes suggest will be discussed in the final chapter.

The theme relationships predominates in the songs of Sure Shot, Baker, and Lady Luscious. Every song concerns itself with relationships with men. Whether the personae discuss the roles they perform in relationships with men, the break-ups they have experienced, or the kind of treatment they expect to receive, the songs are centered around romantic relationships with men.

The differentiating factors for the blueswomen's conceptualization of relationships are the codes that modify and further define the relationship theme. The two predominant
codes under the relationship theme for Baker are love and sacrifice for love. For Sure Shot's songs, the major codes under the relationship theme are sex and possessiveness. The predominant modifying codes under relationships for Lady Luscious are sacrifice for love and self-deception. These modifying codes help create a picture of the types of personae the blueswomen project and illustrate how each uniquely interprets the dynamics of romantic relationships.

Power is another important theme that appears in the lyrics of all three Gates City Blueswomen. Power, after the relationship theme, is the second most significant theme for both Baker and Lady Luscious. Like love, perceptions of power manifests differently according to the modifying codes that fall under it for each blueswoman. The codes self-respect and empowering women occurred most often under the power theme for Baker's lyrics. The codes relinquishing power to a man, self-respect, and self-control emerged as the most important codes under power for Sure Shot's lyrics. For the lyrics of Lady Luscious, the predominant modifying codes under power are self-respect, self-control, self-empowerment, and relinquishing power to a man.

Another important theme that emerged from Baker and Sure Shot was expectations from a man. The code sexual expectations from a man emerged as most significant for both of the women, while relational expectations emerged from Baker's lyrics and emotional expectations emerged from Sure Shot's.

An additional theme worth mentioning that appeared in all three Gates City Blueswomen's songs is community and family. The personae in various songs of the
blueswomen acknowledge the responses family members have to their romantic relationships and usually ignore and refute any advice offered them by the community.

There is little overlap of themes between Marshall's lyrics and the lyrics of the other three blueswomen. Christianity is the predominant theme, and codes that further define aspects of Christianity emerge. These codes are death, God's strength, comfort/happiness, eternal life, God's help, and forgiveness from God. The Christianity theme does not occur in the other singers' lyrics. The theme feeling/emotion emerges, which also emerges from the lyrics of the other singers' as well; however, the feeling/emotion theme is not prominent in their lyrics. The code pain, under the theme relationships emerged from both Marshall's and Baker's lyrics, but Marshall's pain is more closely associated with the challenges of life, while Baker's is concerned with pain in relationships with men. Another theme, hard times, only appears in Marshall's lyrics. Despite the differences encountered when comparing Marshall's songs with those of Lady Luscious, Baker, and Sure Shot, the themes are concerned with difficulties and coping strategies. Gospel lyrics provide a glimpse of the kind of oppression that African American women confront, just as blues does. They differ in their approach, however, as blues seeks to identify the problems, where gospel seeks to uplift.

Chapter five analyzes the results reported in chapters three and four. It discusses and interprets the coding of both the interviews and biographies and the song lyrics according to the theoretical perspectives advanced in the first chapter of this study.
African American women occupy a unique place on the social hierarchy that defines and affects the life experiences of individuals and groups living in the United States. As African Americans, they endure discrimination in American society based in a long history of the Diaspora, slavery, and segregation. As women, their plight is one of objectification, subjugation, and silence. As a result of the impact of both racism and sexism, black women have fewer opportunities for education and often work blue collar jobs earning low wages, thereby suffering a third type of oppression—classism. African American women's experiences as victims of racism, sexism, and classism is referred to by black feminist scholars as multiple jeopardy (King 46).

Working from textual theorist Robert Scholes' concept that culture creates artists who then create texts, in this case performance texts, that are reflective of their culture, this study explores how African American female blues artists are defined by and respond to their tripartite plight and if they, in turn, choose to sing music that reflects their existence in the racist, sexist, classist structure of American society. More specifically, it examines the life stories of four African American blues singers and compares the stories to the lyrics of the songs they choose to perform in order to investigate whether and what ways multiple jeopardy plays out in a classic, uniquely-American artform, blues music.
This chapter analyzes and discusses the results reported in chapters three and four of the personal interviews, biographies, and lyrics of four Gates City blues singers. It attempts to draw conclusions about the presence of multiple jeopardy in the lives of the bluesqueens and to compare their life stories to the lyrics of the songs they choose to perform. Further, this chapter explores the implications of the present study for further research, particularly African American feminist research.

Multiple Jeopardy in the Life Stories of Bluesqueens

This section interprets the results of the coding of the personal interviews and biographies of the blues singers in order to address the first research question: Do multiple jeopardy issues (racism, sexism, classism) emerge in African American blueswomen’s talk about their lives and singing careers? It is organized according to the various elements of multiple jeopardy: racism, sexism, classism.

Racism

From the personal interviews, racism is cited as a source of oppression only by Bessie Marshall. Interestingly, she emphasizes racism from her own race, as she speaks of her rejection by the Gates City black community. She claims that singing in a predominantly white club and performing with an all-white band is constantly “thrown in her face” by African Americans. She discusses her disregard for members of the black community who hate white people and claims that individuals cannot say they are Christian and hate other people. To Marshall, members of society should live together as a “rainbow.” She asks, “If it was one color, it wouldn’t be a rainbow, right?”
Marshall recognizes racism from her white audiences as well. She states she is often the only black person in the all-white club where she sings. She relates an incident in which a white woman accused her of stealing a coat and had her searched by the bartender. According to Marshall, the woman did not even have “the dignity to apologize” after she found the coat elsewhere. Marshall reports that she gave the woman the “benefit of the doubt” because the woman was of an older generation. Marshall refers to her crowds in Gates as predominantly white and claims that members of the entertainment industry “have these little clans,” an interesting word choice to use when discussing racial issues.

While Marshall recognizes racism from both the black and white communities, she is more willing to pardon it from the white community. She claims that it bothers her more for a black person to pass judgment on her than a white person. The assertion “I don’t try to fit in with them” recognizes her negative attitude toward the black community for rejecting her artistic endeavors in the white community. The most significant and surprising finding is that while Marshall acknowledges the impact of racism on her life, she perceives the major obstacle in racial issues to reside with African Americans. Arguably, Marshall participates in her own subjugation by separating herself from the African American community and pardoning members of the white community. She perceives the burden of overcoming racism to reside with the African American community and maintains a decisively “Christian” and idealistic outlook on racial matters with her rainbow ideology.
Marshall exists in a liminal space between black and white cultures. Although she works in a white world, she is not a member of that world. Her career, however, has dislodged her from a secure place in the African American culture. From her vantage point on the threshold of both communities, she is able to identify racism operating in both communities. Her reactions to racist acts from each community are quite different. She claims, for example, that the members of her own race should be happy for her that she has found work and is a success. And, if they do not approve of her actions, she avoids contact with them. When racist actions come from the white community, on the other hand, she suffers them silently, claiming that it is her place to compensate for their ignorance.

Lashunia Baker, Sure Shot, and Lady Luscious report that they have not encountered any difficult situations based on race either in the entertainment industry or in communities in Gates City. Even when asked directly about racism, they deny its operation and effect on their careers, their perceptions with regard to racism may be explained in one of three ways: First, they do not experience racism; second, they do not perceive racism; third, they do not choose to discuss racism that they perceive. It is highly unlikely that any African American living in America, particularly in highly conservative and segregated Gates City, Texas, has not experienced racism. It is more likely that having been reared in the Gates City area that these bluesqueens have internalized and accepted as natural the institutionalized racism that pervades American culture. Hence, they would perceive and label only overt physical and verbal acts as
racism. In that case, they experience racist ideologies but do not perceive racism, a phenomena that cultural critic John Fiske identifies as nonracist racism (38-41). The third possibility, the choice not to discuss racism, acknowledges my own position as an outsider, more specifically a white academic conducting research in an African American community. The Gates City Blueswomen may have been unwilling to discuss racial issues or voice racial concerns with a white researcher from a local university. I may have been perceived as "from the other side," a voice that neither represents nor protects them. Perhaps the risk was too great.

Sexism

The findings related to sexism in the personal interviews and biographies are as surprising as the findings regarding racism. Marshall, again, is the only interviewee who claims to recognize traditional sexism. When asked about the treatment of women in the entertainment industry, she states that "it's a war—a political thing, really." The way to combat the sexism, according to Marshall, is to "have an attitude." The members of the Gates City Blueswomen, however, identify sexism from women, in particular female audience members. In their performances, the interviewees boast of being full-figured, brag of being better able to please men sexually than small women, and sometimes sing to particular male members in their audiences. These actions on the part of the blueswomen result in the negative verbal and nonverbal reactions from women in their audiences. Female audience members, on more than one occasion, have approached the Gates City Blueswomen and harshly criticized them for behaving in the manner they do
during performances. Baker has received physical threats and once had her chair pulled out from under her by a woman.

That Marshall identifies sexism in the music industry is no surprise given her educational and professional background as well as her liminal status with regard to the white and black communities. It is surprising, however, that the other three interviewees identify women, not male audience members or men within the music industry, as the individuals who assail them. The blueswomen voice rebellion against the traditional sex roles that are expected of them as African American females through their performances. In doing so, they primarily assert their sexual independence from these traditional roles. The interviews suggest that the female members of their audiences, who occupy these roles on a daily basis, respond negatively to their stage personae. The physical and verbal threats by female audience members appear to be attempts to police the actions of the bluesqueens, to make them conform to the sexist conventions of the culture. Although sexism surfaced as an identifiable jeopardy in the interviews, it did not adhere to the traditional conceptualization of sexism that assumes that men and masculine institutions jeopardize women.

Classism

The findings from the interviews and biographies suggest that the bluesqueens experience classism in their lives and in the music industry. Marshall, in particular, notes elements of classist treatment from society and the music industry. She claims she had to raise her two daughters by herself, without any help from the government or their father.
She also states that she wants to be remembered for giving love, as she does not have anything else to give. Her career has been successful not as the result of having a good agent or manager, but because she has made her own connections and established herself as a blues artist in the local music scene. She has never been able to afford the luxury of a manager to help her.

Sure Shot discusses her humble beginnings, touring with a gospel group by fitting twelve choir members into one Volkswagen. Baker and Lady Luscious talk about their beginnings in the music industry as well. They toured with gospel groups and were not able to establish themselves as individual artists until much later in their careers. The fact that they could not afford the means by which to establish a successful career (e.g., a bus or a manager) denotes a lack of resources and a discrimination within the entertainment industry that implies one must already have access to certain financial means in order to achieve success. In short, because of their depressed economic status, each of the bluesqueens had to struggle to have her talent noticed and ultimately recognized within the entertainment industry. Whereas singers with access to financial means could hire others to promote them while they focused on establishing their talent, the bluesqueens had to divide their energies between self-promotion and developing polished performances. The bluesqueens do not cite these incidents as classism, but their presence in the bluesqueens narratives indicates an experienced awareness of their class status.

While the coding suggests there are elements of classism present in the topics that were broached in the interviews and biographies, these issues were more covert than
either racism and sexism. Only Marshall discusses her past social status as a single, poor mother. The other three interviewees do not discuss their social status outside of the music industry. The only exception among the Gates City Blueswomen is Sure Shot, whose metaphor of the blues as wanting to go shopping but having to pay a bill instead, suggests the depressed economic status of the bluesqueens.

Multiple jeopardy is evidenced in the lives of Marshall, Baker, Lady Luscious, and Sure Shot, four Texas blues singers. The manner in which the individual jeopardies manifested, particularly racism and sexism, were interesting. Traditional concepts of racism and sexism acknowledge oppressive forces that exist outside of the oppressed groups. Sexism is normally thought to come from men and masculine institutions. Racism is traditionally thought to come from the dominant (i.e., white) culture. The idea that intraracial and same-sex discrimination were noted more frequently than the traditional concepts of racism and sexism suggests that the bluesqueens perceive their oppressors, on the whole, to exist within the boundaries of their community. These African American female artists perceive that their worst enemies occupy, on some levels, the same status. It is also interesting to note that only Marshall perceives racial mistreatment from the white community and the entertainment industry, yet she has the most tolerant, idealistic attitude.

A final interesting finding with regard to multiple jeopardy relates to the bluesqueens' perceptions of their roles as performers. All four bluesqueens stated directly that they feel the necessity to uplift their audiences. Sure Shot talks about
looking out into the audience and seeing people less fortunate than her and wanting to inspire her crowd. Lady Luscious claims that blues should not make people sad, but “help them in life.” Baker remarks that she only plays the “uplifting blues,” and Marshall asserts that she feels the need to stop and “see about her fellow man” and “give to the need,” and refers to her singing as a gift that can potentially uplift other people. The desire of the blues singers to help and uplift their audiences may suggest that they feel, as a result of the experiences they have had, that they can provide relief to people having hard times. The multiple jeopardy they encounter serves as a force that has strengthened their identity, self concept, and resolve. It is ironic that those who encounter oppression on every front and occupy a subordinate status in the social hierarchy identify a strong need to help others.

Themes from the Blueswomen’s Life Stories as Reflected in Their Lyrics

Textual theorist Robert Scholes argues that artists are products of their various cultures, not demigods that represent all of human experience in the texts they create. Art does not exist outside the realm of one’s own culture, as that culture determines the artist’s values, identity, and perspective. As a result of the impact of culture on the artist, the texts s/he creates reflect and respond to the culture of which s/he is a part. This section of the discussion addresses the second research question: In what ways do the themes that emerge in the life stories of African American blueswomen compare to the themes in the lyrics of their recorded, commercially available music? The section is organized with a discussion and comparison of the results from all four subjects, a section
that interprets the findings from the Gates City Blueswomen, and a section that interprets the findings from Bessie Marshall.

In Baker's song, "Baby I Love You," the persona orders her man to "get right on down to the real nitty gritty," and explains that the subject to which she is referring is pleasing her sexually. She claims, "if you can get it up, baby, I can get it in." Preceding this verse, the entire song is dedicated to overtly professing her love for her man and describing the great lengths to which she would go in order to make him happy. She would "do without" to ensure his needs are met and would sacrifice her whole life to make him happy. The duality of the messages present in this song is representative of the duality existing in the majority of the lyrics of the Gates City Blueswomen, whose members are Baker, Sure Shot, and Lady Luscious. There is a consistent inconsistency in their perceptions about their roles in romantic relationships with men, one that involves sacrifice, yet commands respect. This duality is closely tied to dualities that emerge in the themes of their life stories. In one respect, the three Gates City Blueswomen's narratives reject traditional social standards by which they are expected to abide, while at the same time they discount and overlook oppression that likely exists in their lives.

When juxtaposed with Sure Shot, Lady Luscious, and Baker, Marshall's life stories and personal ideology are more in accordance with the lyrics she selects for performance. Unlike the other three interviewees, she more willingly examines her subordinate status in society and in her community, while maintaining an attitude of forgiveness and rejecting the notion that issues of social oppression should cause her to
actively confront that which jeopardizes her. Given the worldview expressed in her interviews, it is not surprising that her published material is gospel music, not blues. Gospel recognizes the trials of this earth, yet affirms both forgiveness and the pleasures of the eternal life awaiting after this one. In order to more carefully consider the ideas introduced here, this chapter considers the Gates City Blueswomen separately from Marshall.

The Gates City Blueswomen

As mentioned previously, there is a duality present in the songs that Baker, Sure Shot, and Lady Luscious choose to sing. The major topic for the songs the women sing individually is the dynamics of romantic relationships with men. Although the dynamics of romantic relationships play out differently depending on the personae of the various songs, each of the songs feature a persona who does not define “self” apart from her connection with a man. At the same time, each of the personae either recognizes a need for self-respect or actively demands respect from a man in a relationship. The singers’ lyrics exhibit an interesting combination of self-sacrifice and an assertion of personal power through a demand for respect, sex, and love. For example, within the same song, Lady Luscious claims, “I’ll do anything for you/Anything you want me to/As long as you’re good to me/And give me everything I need.”

The personae that the singers adopt in performance understand that they are deceived by men in relationships, yet they recognize their self-deception in loving inappropriate partners; they grasp their potential for power and relinquish that power to
the men that they love. In short, they grasp their power only to relinquish it. They often ignore the advice of friends and family members to stop deceiving themselves (“my friends tell me there’s no future in loving a married man”), yet they are willing to state their expectations from a man, sexually, relationally, and emotionally. In other words, the ultimate irony is that the personae recognize the oppressive nature of relationships that, at least in part, define their identities, but cling to their men. They acknowledge that their men have ample room for improvement and, in fact, encourage and even demand that the men respect them, but are unwilling to end the relationship if respect is not forthcoming. In this way the personae both accept and oppose the sexism inherent in their relationships.

In the blueswomen’s life stories, a duality emerges that closely resembles the inconsistencies present in their lyrics. In some instances they recognize oppression (i.e., sexism from women); in other instances, they do not perceive, or at least claim to not perceive, overt racism or classism in the music industry or from their audiences. They do note a sexist attitude from some of their female audience members and, in doing so, they identify women as the enemy. They discuss the humble beginnings of their musical careers, but hold no grievances about their under-representation in blues shows or the necessity of managing their own careers.

That the singers do not readily identify oppression does not indicate that they do not confront and oppose oppression. Their careers as blues performers, in and of themselves, allow them to break out of the confines that traditionally restrict African
American women. They travel, openly and sometimes obscenely discuss sex in their art, and create a space for themselves outside of the silenced and poor experiences of a majority of African American women. Additionally, all three singers exhibit a strong sense of self-respect that is evident in their discussions of their lives and their careers.

Sure Shot and Baker perceive themselves to be beautiful, full-figured women who can “do what skinny women can do,” thereby rejecting traditional standards of beauty that exist in America that value white skin and thin bodies. They feel respected in the unique place they occupy in the music industry as blueswomen. Lady Luscious points out that the three women are the first blueswomen group in Gates City. Sure Shot remarks that her granddaughter will be able to say “well my grandmother was an entertainer.”

Finally, all three narrate stories of personal toughness and strong wills. In response to the sexism they experience from some women in the audience, both Sure Shot and Baker boast about the manner in which they handled the situations. Sure Shot claims she told one woman that if she did not approve of her performance she could “take her dead self home.” Baker reports that despite how annoyed the offended women in the audience may make her, she would never “beat up a woman in a bar.”

The foregoing analysis of the results suggests that of the three issues involved in multiple jeopardy, the battle that they choose to engage is the battle of sexism. Ironically, they join this battle not against men and patriarchal institutions, but against women of their own class.
Implications for Multiple Jeopardy

The Gates City Blueswomen's life stories imply that they are independent and do not conform to the expectations of society. Their careers, in particular, allow them to lead less-traditional, less-confined lives. They respect themselves and present themselves as tough women and talented musicians. Yet, they refuse to directly address social issues, namely multiple jeopardy, which necessarily has an impact on their lives. The lyrics of the songs they choose to sing voice both an acceptance and a rejection of the sexism that is prevalent in relationships with men. In one breath a persona may express her willingness to "deny her own self" for her man, while in the next song a persona proclaims, "They say it's a man's world/But you can't prove that by me." Interestingly, though, in some of the lyrics the personae are cognizant of the powers to which they are subjecting themselves. For example, in Lady Luscious' "Damn Your Eyes" the persona relinquishes her power to a man who mistreats her but questions her motives for staying in the relationship.

Despite the transgressive lifestyles the blues singers live and despite the oppositional nature of some of the messages found in the lyrics, they do not recognize oppression. Hence, they only fight it where they perceive it. They perceive the source of their oppression to be women. In addition, they speak only on behalf of themselves as bluesqueens who have rejected the sex roles assigned to them by the American social structure. They neither see nor combat racism or classism, either in their lives or in their art.
Referring back to Scholes' proposition that culture defines the artist who then produces texts that inevitably reflect and respond to the culture, the three Gates City Blueswomen can be perceived as influenced by both the dominant culture and their subjugation by it. The songs they perform exhibit a duality that, ironically, both comments on and feeds oppression based on biological sex. Their life stories reflect a similar duality. The interviewees do not recognize the oppression that confronts them, yet they reject traditional sex, race, and class roles through their blues careers that allow them to travel, project powerful stage personae, and have a voice that is recognized by the public.

In American social structure, the elements of multiple jeopardy are often covert enough to be taken for granted as the norm. Perhaps the degree to which racism, sexism, and classism have become natural and accepted in American society explains why these women do not actively attempt to change the social conditions that are in operation. While there are, at times, elements of transgression in their life stories and lyrics, the women are not able to see the established social hierarchies that oppress them. When they perceive only overt acts of discrimination, the degree to which they are able to confront the issues of multiple jeopardy is finite.

Bessie Marshall

In her both life stories and lyrics, the findings on Marshall provide an interesting contrast to Sure Shot, Lady Luscious, and Baker. In her life stories she shares some similarities with the Gates City Blueswomen, such as her church and gospel background
and her emphasis on family in both her background and in the formation of her identity. Her attitudes and values on issues of racism, sexism, and classism differ entirely in that she fully recognizes the impact these jeopardies have on her career. Her attitude toward these issues, however, is one of pardon and forgiveness, which are themes echoed in her songs. Her published material, gospel music, differs thematically from the blues songs performed by the Gates City Blueswomen. Gospel, as noted throughout this study, cites hard times, but emphasizes the life after this one and forgiveness from God. Blues, on the other hand, feature a disgruntled persona who reports dissatisfaction with states of affairs in this life.

Like the Gates City Blueswomen, Marshall’s musical background is grounded in singing at church at an early age and growing up in a family in which her family was active in church choirs. She has sung gospel music throughout her life and continues to do so in the club where she plays the blues. In her life stories, she emphasizes her family, namely her daughters to whom she refers as “talented musicians.” She considers herself a blues singer and conceptualizes blues as a gift that helps people and is strongly tied to emotion, a conceptualization that shares many of the same characteristics of the other three interviewees. The non-traditional nature of her career that has allowed her travel and the self-respect that prevails in her discussion of self, serve to make her, by nature of these qualities, a somewhat subversive individual.

Her life stories, when juxtaposed with those of the other three subjects, stand alone in their recognition of racism, sexism, and classism. However, she does not
challenge these oppressions. For example, Marshall pardons the woman in the bar where she works for accusing her of stealing her jacket because she was “of a certain age.” She recognizes that because she is female, there are political issues in the entertainment industry that involve her sex. She claims “it’s a war, a political thing.” She goes on to say that one has to have an attitude and set out to prove oneself.

Issues of classism emerge in Marshall’s stories of having no one to represent her in the music industry. She emphasizes the necessity of making it without help from others. Classism effects her life in the present as surely as it did in the past. Her experience of classism is evident in her references to raising her daughters single-handedly and to “giving love” to people because she has never had anything else to give. Often she is the only black person in the club where she works, which is a class issue as well as an issue of race. Only middle to upper class white tourists patronize the bar, which invokes the idea that only a certain class of people can afford to attend the club.

Overall, Marshall wishes that the different ethnicities would live in harmony, as the multiple colors that are necessary to a rainbow. She excuses racism from the white community, but is offended by the members of the black community who do not respect her for trying to “make it” in the white, masculine music industry. In addition, her strong Christian values inform her concept of appropriate responses to social problems. For example she asks, “How can you call yourself a Christian and hate another person?”

There is a direct connection between Marshall’s life experiences as both oppressed and forgiving that is echoed in the songs she has chosen to record. It is
interesting that her published material is gospel music, even though she defines herself primarily as a blues singer. In her gospel songs, themes of forgiveness, God's love, salvation, eternal life, and earthly suffering emerge. Her personae speak of hard times—such as a mother's death and being "sometimes up, sometimes down"—but the recognition of hard times always is followed by the assertion that Jesus forgives and heaven awaits. The chariot is going to sweep down and carry her home. By looking to the afterlife the personae are able to overlook and forgive the pain encountered in this life. The attitudes of the personae in her gospel songs closely resembles Marshall's attitudes about life in her recognition of the issues that confront her; she is able to dismiss them to some degree based upon her Christian beliefs and her attitude that communities should live in harmony with each other.

The foregoing analysis of the results suggests that Marshall recognizes all of the faces that constitute multiple jeopardy. Yet, in the music that she has chosen to publish, which is in some ways remarkably similar to the stories she tells about her own life, she chooses a non-confrontational stance.

Implications for Multiple Jeopardy

Marshall is aware of that which oppresses her, but in her life stories and lyrics, she chooses to excuse it and, in this way, participates in her own subjugation. The Gates City Bluesqueens, who voice at least some degree of opposition (even though it is interspersed with sacrifice) to the way things are do not see racism, sexism, and classism as prominent issues is in their lives. Marshall, on the other hand, recognizes the issues
but is relatively satisfied with making the most of her status. She, too, has been written by two cultures—the dominant culture which is racist, sexist, and classist to an alarmingly subtle and covert degree, and the culture of African American women who, as Madison claims, create “spaces” where they can interpret their life experiences (215).

Marshall’s stories are riddled with ironic opinions on social issues. She recognizes oppression and chooses to forgive it. The texts she performs underscore the cultural influences that dually define her.

One possible reason for Marshall’s refusal to engage social issues in the songs that she makes available commercially may be tied to her liminal status between black and white worlds. At present, the success of her career is dependent on white social structures, the white club where she performs, the white members of her band, and the white audiences who come to hear her sing. Although her singing clearly arises out of African American traditions and, therefore, keeps her connected with that world, her alliance with the white world has pushed her to the margins of the black community. Unappreciated by the black community and patronized (if not accepted as a member) by the white community, Marshall is not likely to fight causes in her published music that confronts the racist, sexist, and classist attitudes of her audience. Her liminal position may explain the curious duality in her life narratives and the lack of confrontation in the lyrics of the songs she records.
Implications for Further Research

This study found that the bluesqueens do not actively oppose the forces of multiple jeopardy in their lives. Although Marshall recognizes her subjugation, she chooses to pardon those who oppress her. The Gates City blueswomen, on the other hand, either do not perceive or choose not to acknowledge the issues of multiple jeopardy in their lives. It is not surprising then that none of the lyrics of the ten songs coded in this study reveal an oppositional stance to the societal structures that keep African American women at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchies.

What is most interesting is that the four women do wage battles. The battles that they wage, however, are the ones that are most immediate, most pressing, and most immediately recognizable. More importantly, these battles emerge as the result of the tension that exists because of their relationships to both the dominant culture and their subordinate culture. Marshall, for example, claims that it “hurts her worse” to be disrespected by an African American than by a white person. Although she is a member of the African American community, the subordinate culture, her career is dependent on the white community, the dominant culture. Consequently, she has had to separate herself, to a certain degree, from the black community. She claims that she no longer fits in and, when she encounters disrespect in the African American community, she feels pain but resolutely dismisses the offender, thereby cutting herself off from the subordinate culture and aligning herself with the dominant culture. It is the necessity of aligning herself with the dominant culture in order to achieve success in her career that
distances Marshall from her own culture. In playing the tension between the two cultures, she ultimately is forced to make decisions in favor of the dominant culture to the detriment of her own culture.

The Gates City Blueswomen claim that they are much less dependent on white culture for their success. It is not surprising, then, that their battles do not occur along the lines of race. The primary battle that they identify is a battle with female members of their audiences, which suggests that the oppression that they fight is one that is based in sexism. Yet, they claim not to have any problems with the male dominated entertainment industry in Gates City or with club owners. They do note, however, that most blues singers in the area are male and that "shows" often feature male singers with an occasional female act to warm the audience up. Further, they talk about their wild antics on stage. Although the Gates City Blueswomen do not make this connection, these factors in combination suggest that the women may have to display themselves in a particular way in order to attract the attention necessary to get performance engagements. In order to achieve success, according to this line of reasoning, the females have to cater to male tastes, which creates a rift between the bluesqueens and the female members of their audiences. Like Marshall, then, the Gates City Blueswomen may be forced to make performance decisions in favor of the dominant, male culture of the Gates City entertainment industry to the detriment of the female subordinate culture to which they belong biologically.
Classism, or more specifically economic oppression, may be evident in another way in this study. The recording industry is dependent on the tastes of their audience, an audience whose demographic profile suggests that they have enough disposable income to buy luxury items like CDs and audiocassettes. In deciding what songs to include on commercially available recordings, it is not inconceivable that the women in this study either choose songs that they know will appeal to the buyers of CDs and audiocassettes or that they are advised by producers to include selections that will appeal to a broader audience. The majority of the songs from the Gates City Blueswomen’s CD are covers of songs made popular by famous recording artists. Similarly, Marshall’s audiocassette contains classic songs that would be easily recognizable to the average person on the street with a disposable income. In short, the songs that are available may not reflect their inner feelings or their experiences in the world. Instead, they may reflect the prevailing tastes of their producers and the general public.

This study occurred as a response to Kathleen Daly’s challenge to researchers and individuals to cease “thinking, imagining, and speaking as if whiteness defines the world” (59). It also was informed by black feminist thought, which asserts the necessity of feminism to confront oppression on multiple fronts and accept that all women do not share similar experiences and histories in the complex social structures that exist in the United States. That the African American women interviewed in this study do not recognize or overtly confront the issues of multiple jeopardy in their lives or recorded music has social implications that need to be explored. Research that generally
emphasizes uncovering and closely examining the inconsistencies found in black female artistic texts may prove useful in understanding where the points of departure and points of overlap between dominant and subordinate cultures exist.

The findings of this study draw attention to issues of great interest to African American feminist critics. The idea supported by feminist blues scholars who argue that blues singers have traditionally thrown off oppression in both their lifestyles and music (Carby; Harrison) is both supported and undermined in this feminist interpretation of the life experiences and texts of four bluesqueens. The study found that themes of multiple jeopardy do occur in the lives of the blueswomen, subtly in some instances and overtly in others. The texts they select for performance reflect their judgments about their place in the hierarchy that defines life for Americans. The study, however, found that the blues singers did not confront oppression on all fronts. Their personal ideology, their songs, and their personal decisions were not consistently subversive.

Although the bluesqueens interviewed for this study did not confront oppression on all levels, they still subvert racism, sexism, and classism on some fronts (artistic and experiential) some of the time. Marshall readily identifies that which harms her, such as her lack of resources as an artist or her being the only black person in a club of all white people. Lady Luscious recognizes the grave importance of the blueswomen's show being an original in Gates City. Baker stands up for herself against the sexism she perceives to come from female audience members, sings Aretha Franklin songs, and boasts of being able to travel to Finland, something that few black women probably ever have the
opportunity to do. Sure Shot defends herself against the sexism from women her audience by confronting them directly and sings lyrics that are concerned primarily with having sex. The inconsistencies found between the lyrics and the life stories are intricately tied up in the inconsistencies that occur in culture, and the points of departure of dominant and subordinate cultures. These points of departure, these inconsistencies between worlds need to be explored further in order to more adequately explain the complicated process that guides artists in their creation and performance of texts.

Conversely and equally important, black feminists should continue to explore the texts of African American women in order to more fully understand the inconsistencies of culture. More specifically, future studies of this type should avoid looking exclusively for patterns of resistance to the dominant culture. A more fruitful avenue of inquiry would also examine minorities' connections with and dependence on dominant culture in relation to their strategies of resistance. Communication studies suggest that oppressed groups are adept at code switching in order to successfully navigate situations in which power relations are unequal. The creators of artistic forms of communication who happen to be from oppressed groups are no less subject to code switching as they seek to reach a broader audience, an audience that is only reachable through institutions controlled by the dominant culture.

In order to establish a more direct connection between life stories and lyrics, future research about bluesqueens should study the lyrics the women write. This study was not able to accomplish that goal because of the difficulty in attaining access to the
blues singers and, therefore, relied on recorded material. While recorded material is important in revealing the selection process for performance, it does not directly extract the issues which may be more accurately described in the lyrics the singers compose themselves.

Another issue that researchers need to consider is gaining adequate access to blueswomen for data collection purposes. Because bluesqueens often have busy schedules or may simply be unwilling to trust researchers who represent an institution that does not represent them (e.g., academia), ample time must be allowed for thorough data collection.

Further, as researchers fill in missing pieces of the complex nature of oppression that pervades the lives of African American women, they will be better able to understand the messages and interactions of a culture created by racism, sexism, and classism. Cultures exist not on only opposites sides of borders; they exist in intricate manners inside and outside the bounds of dominant cultures. As researchers expand their definition of intercultural “strangers” (Gudykunst and Kim) to include subordinate groups within other cultural entities, the dynamics of the cultural differences may be revealed. The greater our understanding of cultures, the more competently we may communicate interculturally. As this study points out, studies of texts and art may lend themselves to achieving a more enlightened understanding.

Continuing research of not only bluesqueens but other African American female artists as well will prove invaluable in a search to understand culture and the messages
therein. Robert Breen, a performance theorist, claims, “It is ironic and comic that our
consciousness of self is more vividly and accurately revealed in the distorting mirror of
art than in the clear light of our social reality” (53). Perhaps the greater irony is that
cultural entities and identities are more vividly and accurately revealed in the distorting
mirror of art.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS INFORMED CONSENT
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS INFORMED CONSENT
The following interview guide contains questions that were asked to blueswomen in an attempt to determine whether they implicitly or explicitly recognize the operation of racism, sexism, or classism in their life experiences and whether they use these experiences when selecting songs for performance. The interview guide is divided into three sections.

The first section of interview questions probes personal history and its relationship to the lyrics of the songs they choose to perform.

1. Tell me about your life, your personal history?

2. When did you begin singing?
   
   Probe 1: Why did you begin singing the blues?

3. You sing primarily the blues. Can you explain what it is about the “blues feeling” that you identify with?

4. Who would you identify as your major blues influences?
   
   Probe 1: What is it about his/her music that you admire? (If the artist identifies content/lyrics, probe for what the songs say about life experiences. If they identify blues style or styling, move to another question.)

   Probe 2: Could you identify a favorite song by this artist?

5. What do you write about?
   
   Probe 1: What are the subjects of your songs?

   Probe 2: Could I have access to some of your songs for use in my study?
6. Would you be willing to tell me the story that led to the writing of a particular song?

7. How do you think your personal history and your life experiences have influenced the songs you’ve written?

The second group of questions was asked to elicit information regarding the artist’s actual and preferred audiences. The questions also seek information about the artist’s personal experiences as a musician in various communities.

1. How would you describe your current “typical” audience?
   
   Probe 1: Describe the qualities of an ideal audience.
   
   A) Why is this your favorite audience?
   
   Probe 2: Describe your least favorite audience.
   
   A) What are the characteristics that make it your least favorite audience?

2. What group or groups of people do your songs speak for?
   
   Probe 1: Whose experiences do your songs speak about?
   
   Probe 2: Do they speak for African Americans or women? Do they speak for a particular class?

3. Describe the working conditions for black female musicians in the entertainment industry.
   
   Probe 1: Can you recall for me a personal experience that illustrates the clubowners’ and agents’ attitudes toward black female musicians?
4. Do you sing for yourself or for your audience?

Probe 1: Is singing the blues something that you do primarily to express your own feelings or do you sing to express feelings that the audience shares? Explain.

The third group of questions is general and is designed to stimulate narratives and personal accounts.

1. What would you like to be remembered for fifty years from now?

2. Tell me the story of the most memorable performance you ever gave.

3. Tell me the story of your worst gig.

4. Would you tell me the story of how you came to perform with your current band?

The questions included in the interview guide are designed to elicit stories about life experiences that involve racism, sexism, and classism. As part of the interview process, the artists are asked to provide lyrics to blues songs they have written. In keeping with Scholes' notion of interpretation as a guide, the study will examine blueswomen's lyrics in light of the context provided through their narratives of personal experience.
APPENDIX C

LIST OF SONG TITLES
List of Song Titles


1. Baby I Love You
2. Do Right Woman
3. Misty Blue
4. Neither One of Us
5. Just a Little Bit
6. Tonight is the Night
7. Doctor Feel Good
8. Right Arm for Your Love
9. Damn Your Eyes
10. If Loving You Is Wrong
11. Proud Mary


1. Hem of His Garment
2. Swing Low
3. Will the Circle Be Unbroken
4. This Little Light
5. Old Rugged Cross
6. Oh Happy Day
7. How Great Thou Art
WORKS CONSULTED


