

Fishing for More

Throughout grade school country music played a major role in my life. In computer class while we monotonously copied professional letters and memos I literally had Kenny Chesney's *The Road and The Radio* on repeat for the duration of every class. All the radio stations in my mom's Jeep Wrangler were tuned to country music radio. I couldn't get enough of that down-home country-livin' twang. I wasn't the only one though. Most of my peers joined me in devotion to country music and the lifestyle it promotes. The world was right back then, everything was easier, simpler, and more *comfortable*. So why have my tastes changed to the polar opposite of the spectrum? Why do I so deeply loathe country music now? The simple answer is that *I've* changed. The reasons for this change will be examined in the remainder of this essay.

Even back when I was a country music fan I never liked Justin Moore. I was still listening to country music when he started producing it on a large scale: That's why I've decided to involve him in this project of self-discovery. I've enjoyed country music, but never his. Moore's music in my eyes represents every reason I started to, and now continuously avoid country music and its culture.

I thought Justin Moore was the stereotypical male country music artist; starting this project I didn't enjoy Moore's music because of what I thought it personified. *Time* magazine columnist Alexandra Silver writes about Billy Currington's hit song *Pretty Good at Drinkin' Beer* and elegantly describes my feelings toward the music and culture;

"Pretty Good at Drinkin' Beer" is a song about a guy who is ... pretty good at drinking beer. And only drinking beer. It's a track on *Enjoy Yourself*, Billy Currington's latest album, which,

According to the singer's website, "is more than songs about dogs and beer." But "Pretty Good" is a No. 1 hit, appealing, no doubt, to all the women who've been waiting for the type of man it celebrates (TIME)."

Not only do these songs promote a sedentary lifestyle, but the artists (in this case Billy Currington) actually convince themselves that the songs have more meaning than the straight forward lyrics they present!

People are fans of Justin Moore. His twitter account has well over seven hundred thousand followers (in comparison I myself have about eighty five) which proves that people want to hear what he has to say (Twitter). But what *kinds* of people are interested in Moore? What does it say about you that you enjoy listening to his music? What does it say about me that I no longer want to listen to it? Let's explore these questions sociologically.

The term "blue collar" came to mind immediately in my research. The phrase is widely known to many as describing the working class of people. If you are considered a blue collar worker you are seen socially as middle-class at best. Sherrie Scott of *Demand Media* describes it; "The terms "blue collar" and "white collar" are occupational classifications that distinguish workers who perform manual labor from workers who perform professional jobs. Historically, blue-collar workers wore uniforms, usually blue, and worked in trade occupations. White-collar workers typically wore white, button down shirts and worked in office settings. Other aspects that distinguish blue-collar and white-collar workers include earnings and education level." (Scott)

Blue collar workers typically don't possess an education higher than that of high school. Of course, trade occupations such as carpentry or plumbing usually require a form of education in those fields, but not a rounded one (Scott).

Moore is not educated past the high school level. As we have just discussed this attribute places Moore himself in the category of blue collar. We could say Moore is a blue collar country music singer. This aspect allows him to relate to the working class and rebel against the "white collar" worker in his music. Moore's track *I Could Kick Your Ass* is a perfect example. In the

song Moore describes a rich guy (a “white collar” worker) with a fancy sports car and trophy women. Sounds like the life right? Well then Moore proceeds to explain how he could kick the rich guy’s ass. Why would he want to project that kind of behavior in his music? The answer is [✓] *Yes!* that he’s reaching out to his fans. Many of his blue-collar fans would love to “kick the ass” of the guy they all work for because that is the mentality of their blue collar culture.

My argument is this; why kick somebodies ass for being rich when you could focus your efforts on becoming the rich guy with the nice car and the beautiful women? Maybe because his fans are just really angry, but probably because his fans enjoy the blue collar lifestyle more than they could even know.

It is easy for *me* to sit here and argue that the blue collar culture is lackluster. The hard thing to do is understand and accept *why* people might enjoy that culture. Understanding who you believe yourself to be is scary. It takes some serious stones to look yourself in the mirror and see who you are and why without seeing who you want to be. I don’t even possess the ability to see myself at this point in my life. I think I was trying to blame Moore and country music for turning me against my roots (the social class that raised me), but in reality there was no reason for this change in me other than life. The experiences I’ve had and paths I’ve chosen led me to the person I became. Who am I to judge those who haven’t had the same experiences and [✓] therefore couldn’t possibly think the way that I do. Acceptance is a part of growing and I can accept that people will continue to gravitate towards music they can escape to. Beating up the source of my torment might actually be pretty satisfying.

Moore comes from a town called Poyen, Arkansas, population less than 300 as of 2010 (American Fact Finder). Never heard of it? I’m not surprised. People who do not avidly follow Justin Moore usually haven’t. This example of small-town influence can be found in Justin

Moore's song *Small Town USA*. I like this song. It reminds me of John Mellencamp's *Small Town*, which takes me to a place where I am nine years old riding in a truck with my dad. Don't get me wrong making a country playlist on my Spotify account because of *Small Town USA* is not something I intend to do, but even I can relate to the feelings that Moore tries to capture in the lyrics. That's the point, anyone who has grown up in a small town could. Small towns have their own charm that can only be understood by those who have lived there and experienced that atmosphere. Moore is smart in that he exploits this (whether on purpose or not) to sell albums to millions of us small town folk.

Beville Darden, writer for country music news-site TheBoot.com, interviewed Justin Moore in August of 2009. In an article titled *Justin Moore does Big Thinks with 'Small Town'* Moore's rise to stardom is examined. When Moore first got to Nashville, Beville writes "Nashville songwriters didn't want to give their best material to an unknown "redneck from Arkansas," so he had to create that material himself (Darden)." While Moore's music itself might be laid back and contain relaxed connotations of rural life, he has actually put in the work to make those songs famous. In fact, nine out of the ten tracks on his self-titled debut album were written by him (Darden). Discovering Moore's ambitious nature helped me him as more than a dumb "redneck from Arkansas".

That is where my appreciation peaks. Any other information I could dig up lead straight to giving the fans what they want. Moore writes songs about things that he has experienced or things that he knows everyone in "*Small Town USA*" has experienced. There is nothing wrong with this, but for me to personally enjoy something it has to be new to me and bring out some semblance of emotion. I listened to country music for so long that I have heard it all before.

There is something to be said for consistency here. Maybe the fans don't want change. Maybe what they like is what they know. I certainly can't blame anyone for not wanting to explore something they do not readily understand. Knowledge is a powerful and sometimes scary thing. Questioning your beliefs and the routines of your everyday life is not something everyone has the ability to do.

I joined the Marine Corps at the end of high school and that experience changed a lot of things about me throughout the five-year term I served. I met people who opened my eyes to different ways of thinking. I started to think more critically about my views of the way things are. This, I believe, is one of the reasons I now despise country music. It's too easy. I don't hear the music the same way that I used to. My persona has changed from being someone who is okay with the laid back lifestyle to someone who is (or sees himself as) ambitious. Someone who thinks that being comfortable all the time and "enjoying the moment" isn't enough. The world doesn't become a better place from sitting on a lawn chair and drinking a beer. If we're not all here to make the world better than it was when we came into it, then why?

I've listened to country music. I've hunted and fished. I've done doughnuts on back roads and giggered for frogs in ponds. I've done just about everything a boy can do, but I can no longer enjoy country music when there is so much Moore.

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Twitter/ Justin Moore