Rebel Manhood: The Hegemonic Masculinity of the Southern Rock Music Revival

Jason T. Eastman

Abstract
Southern men occupy a contradictory place in U.S. culture as the rest of the country stereotypes them as backwards and deviant, yet simultaneously celebrates Southern males as quintessential exemplars of American manhood. I explore this contradiction using interviews with musicians, participant observation of concerts, and an ethnographic content analysis of contemporary Southern rock lyrics and websites. I find marginalized men embrace a Southern rebel identity to meet hegemonic masculine ideals shared across social classes and geographic regions. Rebels reject the middle class roles and cultural capital most men use to signify their manhood by accruing authority and resources through education, career, and family. Instead, southern rebels empower the masculine self by protesting authority figures, dominating women and signifying their independence by drinking, using drugs, and brawling. While rebels define their selves in contrast to middle-class morals and practices, dismissing them as deviant and backward overlooks how rebels use the symbolic resources they have at their disposal to meet the hegemonic masculine ideals celebrated throughout the country.

Keywords
masculinity, class, inequality, gender, Symbolic Interaction

1Coastal Carolina University, Conway, SC, USA

Corresponding Author:
Jason T. Eastman, Department of Psychology & Sociology, Coastal Carolina University, P.O. Box 261954, Conway, SC 29528-6054
Email: jeastman@coastal.edu
The American “South” occupies a contradictory place in American culture. Although many Americans stereotype the region as a backward cultural wasteland, Southern musicians have produced most of the genres considered quintessentially American (Eastman, 2012; Malone and Stricklin [1979] 2003). American audiences celebrate the music that reflects the South’s uneasy legacy of a strict patriarchy and an almost feudalistic class structure of “haves and have nots.” For example, a common theme in Southern music is the personal struggle Southern men confront because of a centuries old, contradictory moral code (Butler 2003)—a code that emphasizes personal honor and strict adherence to Christian values in public while privately encouraging men to suspend gentle sociability and prove their manhood by drinking, gambling, having sex with prostitutes, and dueling (Friend and Glover 2004; Watts 2008).

“Hillbilly artists” like Hank Williams brought music celebrating these sinful behaviors to national stages in the first half of the twentieth century (Malone 2006; Ownby 1990). In the 1950s, “rockabilly” musicians, including Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Johnny Cash, reaffirmed the perception of Southern men as deviant when they brought Black music and sexuality to national audiences (Betrand 2004). During the 1960s, progressive rock music demonized the South as the source of the country’s ills. However, in the following decade, musicians pushed Southern, white, masculine rebelliousness back to the forefront of popular culture as “outlaw country” by artists such as Hank Williams Jr. and the “Southern rock” of bands like Lynyrd Skynyrd “(re)southernized” American music (Butler 1999; Ching 2008; Cobb 1982; Elmore 2010; Ownby 1998; Wells 1996). Today, many artists still celebrate the traditional South through songs about the darker aspects of lower-class life: drinking, drugs, violence, prison, poverty, infidelity, sin, and death (Eastman and Schrock 2008).

A contradiction emerges as Americans recognize Southern culture as distinct and even deviant (especially as expressed in music) yet also as central to the U.S. experience. However, most scholars neglect to explore this contradictory relationship. While many analysts have documented Southern uniqueness in a mass of descriptive studies, few contextualize Southern identity in terms of the United States’ mainstream culture. In this study, I go beyond describing the Southern manhood expressed in contemporary Southern rock music by also situating “Southernness” into the masculine ideals of American culture. First, I detail the literature on masculinity and social constructionist theories of class reproduction. I link these literatures through the processes of identity construction to reveal how Southern men rebel from middle-class norms and social roles to compensate for their marginal class status and meet
the cultural standards of American manhood. I discover while Southern rock-
ers deviate from middle-class practices, roles, and cultural capital, they still
reflect U.S. masculine ideals because they rebel in order to meet the pre-
scribed tenets of American manhood.

**Class, Culture, Masculinity**

Masculinity scholars continue to uncover both the influence patriarchal cul-
ture has on individual identities and the interconnections between manhood
and class. Many of these scholars build on Connell’s (1987) concept of
*hegemonic masculinity*, which refers to an ideal and abstracted form of man-
hood that is both celebrated by an entire culture and thus shared by men
across social classes. Connell describes how in Western nations *all men of
all classes* are under immense social pressure to conform to this ideal type of
manhood, which prescribes strength, dominance, aggression, independence,
rationality, physical vigor, competition, and emotional detachment. Individual
men construct their hegemonic masculine selves through identity work that
signifies adherence to gendered ideals using dramaturgical *manhood acts*, or
practices that communicate a masculine identity to others (Schrock and

Yet because hegemonic masculinity is a cultural ideal and sometimes con-
tradictory to itself (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), individual men can
only signify adherence to masculine tenets using the material and symbolic
resources they have at their disposal. For example, many white-collar men
ignore the independence and physical vigor aspects of hegemonic masculin-
ity by signifying their manhood through their cultural capital, career, material
success and domination of subordinates in the workplace (Connell and Wood
2005; Martin 2001; Purser 2009). In turn, men without resources defy subor-
dination using *compensatory manhood acts* like violence or crime to signify
hegemonic masculinity through behaviors that symbolically “claim privilege,
elicit deference and resist exploitation” (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 281).

Connell (1991, 2000, 2005) argues *protest masculinities* grow out of pov-
erty as marginalized men construct their manhood by rejecting middle-class
conventions and using deviance to symbolically empower their masculine
selves. In the United States, scholars associate protest masculinities with
racial minorities trapped in intergenerational poverty as discrimination and
structural disadvantages force many minority men into an underground econ-
omy where masculine selves become entwined with drugs, violence, incar-
ceration, and early mortality (Contreras 2009; hooks 2004; Lorber 1998;
Majors and Billson 1992; Staples 1978). However, Connell originally
conceptualized protest masculinity using the life histories of Australian motorcycle riders who were oppressed by class, not race. Like outlaw bikers in the United States (Hopper and Moore 1990), these motorcyclists signified adherence to hegemonic manhood through misogyny, homophobia and violence. Compensatory manhood acts “put together a tense, freaky façade, making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power” (Connell 2005, 111) as men reject middle-class conventions and protest the authority higher status men (and some women) hold over them.

While almost all males strive to signify the same hegemonic ideals, men exaggerate cross-class differences by constructing their masculine selves in comparison to other men (Cheng 1999; Connell 2005). Men’s efforts to contrast their masculine selves to others often reinforces social inequities as these identity work efforts interlock with other classist, racist, homophobic, and ethnocentric social constructionist processes (Connell 1992; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Schwalbe et al. 2000; Yeung 2006). For example, upper- and even middle-class men use their resources to construct themselves as morally and intellectually superior to lower-class others (Schwalbe et al. 2000). Because elite men have the power to define both themselves and others (Schwalbe 2008), they reinforce prejudicial constructions of the poor as deviant (Liazos 1972); as lacking the appropriate cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984); and as unintelligent, unmotivated, undereducated, uncivilized, and therefore personally responsible and deserving of their low social positions (Collinson and Hearn 1996). Some marginal men’s strategies to cope with deprivation by “hustling” or exploiting an often illegitimate niche underground economy reinforces this labeling and stereotyping (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

In this study, I describe how Southern rebelliousness arises out of the identity work done by marginalized men who strive to signify adherence to hegemonic masculine ideals. As I examine the identity work strategies that account for both a disadvantaged socio-economic status and the widespread hegemonic ideals shared by most men of all classes, I overcome previous researchers’ tendencies to only catalogue protest masculinity and reify it into a set of hypermasculine behaviors (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Because the marginal men I examine in this study lack economic resources and authority, they protest middle-class cultural capital and social roles while using compensatory manhood acts to signify hegemonic masculine ideals. However, while rebels appear deviant, they do not construct their masculine selves by rejecting the entirety of the larger American culture. Rather, rebels use the limited symbolic resources at their disposal to signify the hegemonic masculine ideals shared across the U.S. cultural landscape.
Methods

Like their 1970s predecessors, contemporary Southern rock revivalists glorify the confederate South by fusing blues, rock, and country into a uniquely American music—although many artists now incorporate metal and punk alongside traditional Americana. I drew on the network of Southern rock musicians to define the population frame and engage a quasi-snowball sampling technique using the most accomplished and well-known Southern rocker, Shelton Hank Williams III (also known as Hank III) as the central artist of the scene. During ongoing data collection that spans back six years, I monitored those who toured with Williams and whenever logistically possible included everyone who shared the stage with him in this study. In the second phase, I examined those acts who toured with artists from the first phase, and if these groups identified themselves or their music as Southern, I monitored them for inclusion in this study. To date, twenty-seven underground Southern rock bands took part in this research.

I complemented a qualitative ethnographic content analysis of Southern rock lyrics and websites with more traditional ethnographic methods, including musician interviews and participant observation of their concerts (Altheide 1987). Once I identified a band as part of the underground Southern rock scene, I downloaded their websites and MySpace pages biweekly while collecting their recorded music for a lyrical content analysis. Thus far I have analyzed 52 websites and 1,063 songs. I focused on strategic and intentional representations of rebel manhood in songs, from the stage and on websites to capture how musicians construct an ideal Southern identity in the abstract—or as unrestrained by the limits of everyday life.

Southern rock musicians afforded me the opportunity to examine rebel masculinity in both its ideal form and how it is navigated by an exclusive population of men. Fans consider Southern rock musicians exemplars of rebel masculinity because, within music scenes, those who commit themselves the most intensely to the subcultural identity and lifestyle garner the highest degrees of respect (Fox 1987). In the contemporary Southern rock underground, musicians not only express “Southernness” but fans assume their transient lifestyles enable musicians to embody rebel manhood in ways few others can. Furthermore, musicians’ central place in the scene commissions them as the public role models of Southern, masculine rebelliousness, and musicians undertake identity work efforts to publically reflect this ideal. However, by also interviewing musicians in addition to examining their artistic expression, I was able to explore the backstage ways they construct
idealized rebel masculinity along with how they navigate the rebel identity in their personal lives.

I conducted thirty-nine formal interviews and five follow-up interviews with informants I first spoke with in the early stages of the project. These follow-up sessions along with adjustments made to the topic list throughout the study enabled me to theoretically sample conceptual issues that arose. When conducting interviews with rebels who are antagonistic toward educated men, I tried to cede power to informants and make them feel in control of our discussions (Hoffman 2007; Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001). For instance, instead of strictly administering questions in a predetermined order, I let informants guide the subject matter and simply checked off topics as they arose in conversation or I gently steered the subject of discussion.

I focused interview topics around stereotypical Southern practices as musicians express them in their songs, as indicative of the Southern culture and as parts of informants’ lives on and off the stage. For example, I asked musicians to describe the messages about alcohol in their songs, whether these messages truthfully portray alcohol use in their own lives, if their music accurately depicts the types of drinking they see among their fans, and if their music promotes binge drinking and alcoholism. I asked informants similar series of questions about drugs, violence, racism, and the derogatory depictions of women to illuminate how musicians perceive the subject matter of their songs both in an ideal sense and as Southern practices relate to their own and their fans’ lives.

With the exception of two Southern rockers I spoke to via telephone, I interviewed all informants at concert venues scattered across the East either prior to or immediately following their performances. Whenever possible, I attended informants’ performances after interviews to update them on the progress of my research and to conduct participant observation by documenting concerts with audio and video recordings. To date, I have attended thirty concerts in thirteen different U.S. cities. During my interviews and participant observations, I presented my working-class demeanor through my appearance and vernacular developed from coming of age in small-town Appalachia as opposed to my middle-class, university professor identity. I dressed in jeans and black T-shirts similar to musicians and audiences. My age and race also helped me blend into white, young-adult to middle-aged, Southern rock crowds.

Throughout this research project, I used a grounded theory approach, which is a method of inductive concept building through cyclic processes of simultaneous data collection and analysis that are increasingly used in social justice research because they elicit individual experiences within the
unfolding operations of social institutions and structures (Charmaz 2005). The process began during the early stages of research as I coded data while I collected it. First, I used initial coding to identify recurrent themes by categorizing the data. I followed with focused coding to further refine broad recurrences and axial coding to compare and contrast themes in the data (Charmaz 1983; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Through coding, I illuminated how actors interpret and then react to reality as they perceive it (Charmaz 2003). A concurrent inductive process of data analysis allowed me to conduct an ongoing assessment of how the data complemented and contradicted existing theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). I later molded written memos into draft presentations and publications to further clarify categorical concepts by comparing rebel masculinity to other research findings while better situating “Southernness” into the existing theoretical literature about classed and gendered identities.

The following sections describe the identity work strategies rebel men use to compensate for their lack of the economic resources and authority higher class men use to signify their hegemonic manhood. First, I highlight that because rebel men face limited opportunities to empower themselves through schooling or careers, they protest work, education, and the economic authority of higher class men. Instead of following traditional career paths, rebels signify hegemonic masculinity through the independence irregular employment affords them. Next, I explain how rebel men empower themselves by exploiting women’s bodies and domestic labor while protesting the traditional family breadwinner role. In the third section, I describe how rebel men use the compensatory manhood acts of drinking, using drugs and violence to signify adherence to hegemonic masculinity. Throughout the article, I reveal that while Southern rockers reject middle-class conventions and engage in behaviors most consider deviant, they embrace rebel manhood to signify the same hegemonic masculine ideals most men embody.

**Rebel Manhood as Protest Masculinity**

Since most men use their careers and the material rewards of their jobs to signify hegemonic masculine ideals, class closely interconnects with manhood. However, many lower-class men now face limited opportunities to define their masculinity through their work as globalization and the recessions of the last generation eroded the well-paying blue-collar jobs working-class men once used as the source of their masculine pride (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Faludi 1999; Kimmel 1993). Like other disadvantaged men who are unable to define their manhood through their jobs or the acqui-
sition of human capital (Kimmel 2005), Southern rockers signify hegemonic masculinity by protesting the social institutions rebel men feel shut out of: education and the economy.

**Protesting Education and Rejecting Cultural Capital**

In the one lyrical mention of schooling in the data, Bob Wayne sings “you won’t catch me in no college classroom,” a phrase that substantively and grammatically highlights how Southern rockers reject educational cultural capital. Like other marginal men who substantiate claims to hegemonic masculinity by defining education as “nerdy” (Morris 2008), many rebel men draw on their lack of schooling to signify their manhood, such as when one informant boasts of his “barely eighth-grade education.” Similar to others of the working-class who define college as a waste of time and money (Gorman 2000), the four Southern rock musicians with bachelor’s degrees denigrated their educational achievements. One claimed his religious studies degree was “worthless,” and then protested authority by describing college as “learning pompous professors’ opinions.” Another comments, “I graduated from college with an art degree, which is good if you like to paint houses,” before adding how in college he only “learned how to smoke a lot of dope and drink a lot of beer.”

However, my interviews reveal rebels’ protesting of educational capital does not entail full embracement of the “stupid Southerner” stereotype. For example, one informant argues “a college degree doesn’t make someone smart” before explaining he learns through life experiences. Another told me as an artist he enjoys playing “the wise fool,” or partially embracing the “stupid Southerner” stereotype from the stage because it juxtaposes his “intellectual lyrics” that depict a dignified South:

> To me, it seems easier to sell the redneck, wanna raise hell, be ornery and obnoxious stereotypes of the mass media than it is to sell an image of a dignified South. But at the end of the day, I wanna be seen as the wise fool, someone who could express themselves intellectually, but they can also tap into the things that make life fun. When you put the two together you get that wise fool and that’s what I hope to be perceived as; not as a total idiot.

Although rebels signify their hegemonic masculine selves by protesting intellectual middle-class cultural capital, by embracing their own types of
knowledge, they stop short of completely rejecting the hegemonic rationality men across the class spectrum share.

**Protesting Work and Career**

Like other men with limited success in the economy (Kendall 2000), rebel men signify hegemonic independence by protesting the careers that are central to higher class men’s masculine identities. Rebels define any form of wage labor “slavery” because like other oppressed workers (Hodson 2004), they perceive both employment and employers as overly constraining. For example, Hank Williams III told the crowd elites exploit and emasculate them through their labor: “All you 9to5ers, hard working motherfuckers, you’re busting your balls and no matter what they’re still trying to take something from ya it seems like.” Williams echoes lyrical critiques of work and labor, like Scott Biram’s song “Work” that depicts a father telling his son “gotta work his life away, be another fool standing in a line.” Similarly, Alabama Thunderpussy’s song “Wage Slave” proclaims men sell their “souls” via work for less than a living wage.

Musicians also expressed feelings of worker alienation, entrapment, and exploitation in interviews. Most informants previously held regular jobs or currently work part-time when they are not touring, and these employment experiences inform their songs about work. One musician told me about his disdain for the construction jobs he writes many of his songs about: “I was out there pouring concrete the day before I left for this tour I had 90 pound jackhammer in my hand going brrrr, all day going ‘God I can’t wait for this tour to start.’” Another musician described how his band’s vocalist wrote a song about work because “he hated a print shop job with every ounce of his being; that was the inspiration.” Thus, unlike popular media that glamorizes careers as indicative of hegemonic masculine ideals, Southern rock musicians use their own negative work experiences to write songs for audiences who “slave” in unrewarding and constraining jobs.

**Protesting Economic Authority**

In their songs about work, many musicians highlight the antagonism between social classes as rebels signify hegemonic masculinity through protests of those with economic authority. Hank Williams III and Bob Wayne co-recorded “Working Man,” about a construction worker trading his “sweat and blood” only to first have his wages and then his job cut by both the “boss man” and “a rich politician.” In his song “Working at
Working,” Wayne Hancock claims neither “rich folks” nor “the president” knows how difficult it is to “live on the edge, day-to-day.” In “Quitting Time,” Jocephus of the George Jonestown Massacre quits his job by telling his boss “I’m sick of you telling me what to do . . . kiss my ass, kiss my grits, adios you son-of-a-bitch.” In the chorus he adds, “I think I represent a whole lot of people out there who don’t seem to be getting their fair share,” which echoes the claims of many musicians who told me they write songs their listeners relate to.

In interviews, Southern rock musicians also protested workplace authority by comparing their past employment to their current musicianship. One informant told me:

The worst part of working in an office with a tie is having a shitty boss and being a wage slave. Playing rock-n-roll and going around the country is a free way to live; we’re not obligated to some kind of job, mortgage or being stuck in a life. We have a gypsy freedom versus structure, mortgaged, debt.

In addition to lyrically protesting work, informants also claim their rebel lifestyle is ideal because being a musician affords them hegemonic independence. One explained:

I had a good job and career but I left it. I was working this good job, Fortune 500 company and I was making better money than I had ever made in my life. But I would come into work and the bigwig hardly ever did anything at all. I was a little guy on the bottom of the boat, rowing and that backstabbing motherfucker is beating the drum. He doesn’t give two shits about me and I just realized I don’t want to work for any motherfucker. I just want to be free and playing music is how I was going to do it. I wanted to be my own boss and just be alive and not wake up to punch a clock.

Although rebels lack the power to make convincing constructions of others, like other workers, this rebel defines his own self as harder working and more caring than his and presumably most workers’ management (Lamont 2000).

Informants also signified hegemonic masculinity by comparing their musician selves to other workers (which would include their rebel male fans). In statements that contradict the lyrical framing of work as unrewarding, the less successful musicians describe themselves as forgoing the rewards of a career in order to pursue their lesser-paying but more dignified musical
passion. One musician articulated his choice by asking me: “Do you want to work a job and make a lot of money or do what you want to do and not make a lot of money?” Another says he and his band mates “could have went and worked a mill job and been set-up for the rest of our lives, but we choose to do what we’re doing now because we love it. We’re following our hearts on this one.” One informant even described playing music as the more difficult life course when he told me, “how many times I think it would be so much easier to just go get a job and know I’m going to have 350 bucks a week coming in.” Thus, Southern rock musicians affirm themselves exemplars of rebel masculinity by proving themselves willing to go beyond protesting regular employment by pursuing their passion via a risky life course fraught with economic uncertainty.

Rebel men signify hegemonic, masculine independence both through claims regular employment is overly constraining and protests of higher class “others” they perceive as exploiting workers for their own selfish gains. Thus, rebels are similar to working-class men who define their masculine selves in comparison to managerial men (Collinson 1992). But unlike working-class men, rebels do not grudgingly accept workplace subordination to signify a hegemonic masculine self through the toughness, danger, rewards, and importance of working-class jobs (Iacuone 2005; Willis [1977] 1981). Instead, rebel men signify hegemonic ideals by abandoning and protesting the educations and careers many higher-class men use to substantiate their masculinity.

Dominating Women and Avoiding Family

Many men, including the Southern men of history, signify hegemonic masculinity through hypersexuality and the domination of women (Connell 1987; Grazian 2007). Since these identity work strategies do not neccisitate upper-class resources, rebels are able to empower their masculine selves by objectifying women’s bodies (Bird 1996) and exploiting their domestic labor (Johnson [1997] 2005).

Objectifying Women

Southern rockers adhere to a hegemonic masculine tenet prescribing that men should be highly sexed with a multitude of partners (Pascoe 2007; Wilkins 2009) by boasting of sexual conquests with women who meet celebrated cultural standards of age and beauty. In interviews, musicians glorify how their lifestyle affords them the opportunity to act out this masculine
ideal by meeting many females through their travels. One informant told me, “I’m 42 years old. It’s really cool to see cute young girls at your fucking shows man. They’re like half your age.”

Lyrically, musicians signify hegemonic masculinity through sexual conquest by framing women as semi-malleable objects only a select few men can manipulate (or coerce) into providing sexual access. For example, a common theme of many ANTiSEEN songs, including “Date Rape,” “Fornication,” “Constant Nagging,” “I Don’t Ask You for Nothing,” “Meat Market,” and “Wifebeater,” is a man’s frustration in having to “tolerate” women’s company in exchange for sex. A conversation I overheard between band members about their pursuit of sexual encounters reinforced this construction of women. Even though it undermined his masculine stature, one musician disclosed how he “gave up” trying to have sex with a younger woman the previous evening because she perpetually voiced her uncertainty about the casual encounter—to which this Southern rocker responded, “I’m thirty-four years old and do not have time for this.” These examples highlight how rebels reinforce hegemonic domination by constructing women as only useful for sex objects and not for friendship or companionship.

Rebel men also signify hegemonic masculinity by framing sexual conquests competitively. A tour poster Hank Williams III shares with Lucky Tubb warns men to “lock up your daughters” and “hide your wives,” thus affirming both the sexual predator aspects of hegemonic masculinity and the construction of women as sexual property in need of protection from rebel men. This poster echoes a common Southern rock lyrical story celebrating the “stealing” of women from others, or violating other men’s “proprietary sexual rights” (Johnson [1997] 2005). Unknown Hinson, who often describes himself as “every woman’s dream and every jealous husband’s nightmare,” lyrically entices a woman into a sexual encounter by threatening her spouse in his song “I Ain’t Afraid of Your Husband.” In his song “Straight to Hell,” Hank III first signifies his masculinity through sexual conquest by singing how “he likes a good time and a one-night stand,” then adds how he must hide from a sheriff because he “fucked his wife.”

Like the sheriff in Hank III’s song, musicians regularly sing of aggressively reacting to female infidelity in order to use the violence innate to hegemonic masculinity to vindicate their perceived emasculation that comes from “losing” a woman to another man. For example, many Southern rock revivalists write and perform traditional murder ballads about a man killing a cheating partner. However, musicians admit that while they write these songs based on true stories, they often exaggerate their lyrics. One musician explained:
The one song talking about killing her, that was all true. I really did go home and find her sleeping with my best friend. I didn’t kill her or anything, but that’s what was going through my head. I kind of cut it loose with the record or the song, like a fantasy about what should’ve happened or what could’ve happened, or what I wanted to happen.

Infidelity concerns many musicians because they spend extended periods of time away from their partners. One musician who admitted being unfaithful in a follow-up interview initially told me, “I trust my wife a bunch. I’ve seen people that have been in relationships and then had to leave for two or three weeks, and man it will drive you crazy if you don’t trust her. It will just make you miserable.” Thus, rebels’ objectification of women and framing of sexual conquests as a competition between men results in identity work strategies that signify hegemonic ideals either by gaining sexual access to women or protecting that access from other men.

**Negotiating Relationships and Traditional Gender Roles**

While Southern rockers generally caution against long-term attachments with women as a way to signify independence and emotional detachment, some inevitably commit to relationships. Rebels who find themselves in this “predicament” lyrically signify hegemonic masculinity by dominating women through the ideals and gender roles of the traditional nuclear family. Wayne Hancock, the only informant to publically celebrate his marriage, sings about “loving his baby” because of her baking skills in “Smell that Bread.” Artimus Pyledriver glorifies a woman who submits to “her man” in “Dirt Road, White Girl.” Musicians even combine the control of women’s domestic labor with the objectification of their bodies. Nashville Pussy, one of the few Southern rock bands with female musicians, sings about maintaining a relationship with a woman who is “flat as a pancake but nowhere near as sweet” because she “got real good at giving head and fixing stuff to eat” in their song “Why, Why, Why.” In a song called “One for the Ladies,” Bob Wayne jokingly sings “Shut your mouth, and get back in the kitchen.” From a New York stage, Wayne described how this song offended a “young lady” during his last trip to this city but added how after the show he took “her out to his camper to smooth things over,” implying the exchange resulted in a sexual encounter.

Musicians also glorified traditional female roles and their control over women’s domestic labor in interviews. When I asked one informant if his touring strains his family, he responded:
My wife just has to deal with me being gone. When we meet each other she knew that’s what I did and that’s what I’m gonna do. But it’s good when you get home and you got somebody there cleaning, doing laundry, cooking for you, making you feel at home cause they know you’re not going to be there for very long.

Using somewhat contradictory identity work strategies, while Southern rockers claim men should avoid emotional relationships, rebels justify partnerships if they are afforded sexual pleasure and domestic services—both of which signify hegemonic patriarchal domination.

In songs, musicians highlight the importance of dominating partners by arguing allowing women to “whip” them undermines their hegemonic masculine independence. Hank Williams III sings “I usually don’t let a woman get an upper-hand on me,” while in another he sings about resisting a woman’s control: “She said she’s gonna quit me, if I didn’t quit the booze. So I just started drinking more, to see if she’d really choose.” Rebel men also reinforce the importance of hegemonic independence in their interactions with one another, as I once excused myself to “check in with my wife,” and my informant subsequently “taunted” me for hours about “being whipped.”

However, while rebel men celebrate women’s subordinate place in the family, Southern rockers protest the traditional male breadwinner role. Lyrically, musicians often incorporate their protests of work into their rejection of being fathers and husbands. Unknown Hinson protests fatherhood in “Pregnant Again.” Bob Wayne compares sneaking out on a shotgun wedding to “slipping out of a noose” while in another song, he rejects middle-class materialism by telling his partner “there’s more to life than money and keeping up with the Joneses.” He adds “I’ll be damned to let her get the best of me,” highlighting how rebel men perceive partnerships often involve sacrificing a necessary part of the rebel masculine self. The Legendary Shack Shakers sing how “Hoboes are my Heroes” because they “don’t pay no bills,” while J.B. Beverly sings “I don’t need no money, sure as hell don’t need no wife” as he leaves a partner in “Me & My Blues.”

Furthermore, while Southern rockers react negatively to “losing” women sexually to other men, rebel men affirm their hegemonic independence and emotional detachment by celebrating when partners leave them for better providers. In his “Outlaw Song,” Willie Heath Neal explains how his partner rightly left him for a “suit and tie, briefcase guy, a man with money in the bank—a good looking guy your family will like, who don’t get so drunk when he dranks.” In their song “No Damn Fool,” Throttlerod sings about his inability to provide a partner with “fancy cars,” and then adds if “that ain’t
good enough pack up your bags and go.” In interviews, some musicians described abandoning partners who forced them to choose between music and family. For example, one informant says “we sacrificed a lot. Our bassist went through a divorce from a wife he thought supported him but didn’t. Our guitarist had a really steady, comfy job but he let that go.” From the stage, Bob Wayne tells how a past partner set all of his possessions adrift in a canoe after he refused to cancel an upcoming tour.

In both lyrics and their personal lives, rebel men claim hegemonic masculine independence is not worth sacrificing for companionship. Thus, while rebels are similar to many other men who substantiate their masculinity by dominating their partners, Southern rockers are still unique because they do not draw on their roles as husbands and fathers as a means to signify hegemonic masculine domination (Connell 2005; Cooper 2000; Kimmel 1993; Lamont 2000). That is, while many men traditionally justify or rationalize their patriarchal domination of their families through their status of breadwinner, rebel men selectively choose which patriarchal family ideals to embody. Using somewhat contradictory identity work strategies, rebels dominate their partners while simultaneously claiming their own breadwinner role undermines hegemonic masculine independence.

However, just as few men live up to abstract hegemonic masculine ideals because they cannot be achieved in real life, even Southern rock musicians do not completely rebel from familial love and support. In interviews, musicians made statements such as “we all have families and wives that we love very, very, very, very much and we all miss” or how touring is difficult because “you miss the people at home.” Whereas many informants spoke of loving or being married to their craft, one Southern rocker implies he only finds his purpose in music through his family:

I’m married with a child and that’s absolutely the world to me. All this rock and roll bullshit it’s all fine and dandy but if you don’t have a way to be grounded none of it’s worth it. I wish my wife was out here with me every single day. Growing up I never really had a real close family. My dad went to prison when I was eight and my real mom hauled ass when I was about five. So when I got my own family I decided, fuck, that’s where it’s at.

Similarly, while many musicians spoke of the road as a calling, another informant described how his family called him from the road: “On the road, you’re home is in your head. You keep thinking about your home and you wanna go back. It gives you comfort.” Southern rock fans also violate the
rebels’ code that demands a rejection of family. When Clayton Mills of Dixie Witch announced he was leaving the band because of the birth of a child, fans only left congratulatory messages on their MySpace page.

Rebels’ contradictory approach to family highlights the conflicting nature of hegemonic masculinity and how men can signify their manhood using nearly opposite identity work strategies. Women would likely be informally sanctioned for abandoning partners and children. However, men can either empower their masculine selves by embracing the hegemonic roles of loving father and husband or rebel from those very same family roles and signify their manhood through hegemonic independence and the sexual conquest of multiple partners.

**Compensatory Rebel Manhood Acts**

In addition to rejecting middle-class roles and social capital, rebels signify their masculine selves through the compensatory manhood acts of drinking, drug use, and violent aggression. Many scholars argue higher rates of alcoholism and substance abuse exist among low-socioeconomic-status groups because marginalized individuals use these behaviors to cope with the stresses of poverty (Mirowsky and Ross 1986). However, like all social behaviors, drinking and using drugs also serve as a form of identity work because these acts communicate meaning about the self. For rebel men, abusing drugs and alcohol along with brawling signifies hegemonic masculinity through taking risks and symbolic displays of personal empowerment.

**Drinking Alcohol and Violence**

On his live album, Willie Heath Neal nonsensically proclaims: “If you’re gonna drink like a girl, do it like a man.” Neal seems attuned to how rebel men share compensatory manhood acts with other collectives of hard-drinking males who binge drink to signify adherence to hegemonic masculinity (Peralta 2005). These men exaggerate cultural norms prescribing men consume as much alcohol as possible while proscribing women from drinking at all (Lemle and Mishkind 1989). During our interview, one musician drew on these gendered folkways to explain why so few women attend his concerts: “How many women can relate to getting blind drunk, not having a home and falling asleep on a park bench? Hopefully, not many, right?” This quote highlights how rebels exaggerate cultural mores that presume women do not drink, while defining binge drinking as a manhood act.
During Southern rock concerts, musicians and their fans signify hegemonic masculinity through a ritualistic, binge drinking of alcohol. Nashville Pussy told an audience: “We got sitting in tonight, the fifth member of the band, all the way from Lynchburg Tennessee, Mister Jack Daniels.” During concerts, musicians ask audience members to provide them with drinks. For instance, Scott Biram spilled his drink onstage at one show and many audience members voluntarily purchased him replacements. Biram then proclaimed, “Yeah, line ‘em up God Damn it,” thus signifying his rebel masculine self by offering to drink as much as fans were willing to offer. During one pre-show interview, I declined a drink an informant offered and for the rest of the night he playfully “taunted” me from the stage about my sobriety, jokingly telling the audience not to give me alcohol because I was “on the wagon.”

Like the Southern men of history, contemporary rebels use binge drinking as the precursor to other ritualistic behaviors that signify hegemonic masculinity: aggressive rowdiness and violence. When I asked about fights at their shows, the majority of informants blamed alcohol with statements such as “usually it starts with the liquor,” “starts with the bottle,” “don’t get me on the liquor,” or “it’s always alcohol related.” Another specified how drunken aggression is inherent to rebel men by saying: “that’s the thing with white trash, rednecks, or whatever you call them. They drink too much whiskey and go alpha male. And the type of music I’m putting on definitely makes you want to drink.”

Southern rock could encourage drinking and fighting because so many songs glorify the connection between alcohol and violence. In “Thrown out of the Bar,” Hank III proudly sings “I’ve been beat up bad, been kicked around, been thrown out of every damn bar in this here town.” Before playing this song, he dedicated it to rebel men: “This goes out to some of our rowdy, motherfucking friends out there that sometimes get thrown out of the goddamn club before the night is over with.” On their album Dark Bar and a Jukebox, J.B. Beverly and the Wayward Drifters sing “I’m drinking whiskey, and I’m gonna tear up this town.” In “Gonna Be Some Trouble Tonight,” Wayne Hancock sings about drinking and then “looking for a fight.” Junkrod Joe connects drinking and fighting in “Suicyco Baby,” proclaiming “sometimes I’m drunk and I gotta fight, just the kinda guy I am.” These songs highlight how rebel men exaggerate the violence innate to hegemonic masculinity to signify their manhood (Pyke 1996); although by blaming their actions on alcohol, rebel men avoid hypermasculinity by suggesting the self is overtly dangerous and destructive.
Because Southern rockers signify hegemonic masculinity through drunken aggression, rebel men often fight at concerts. During an interview, a musician told me, “One night I smacked a guy from my stage with the head of my guitar because he was messing with my pedals and then everybody grabbed him and beat him up. It was funny. Then the very next night two guys got in a fistfight.” Musicians often appear to encourage this violence. Scott Biram posted a MySpace bulletin reading “Every SHB show from now on will apparently involve a brawl of some kind. I think it’s great!! Just don’t break my shit or throw beer on me.” During participant observation of concerts, I saw many fights, and the Orlando State Prosecutor even subpoenaed me to testify about an assault I witnessed that sent one man to the hospital during a show featuring Suplexs and Alabama Thunderpussy. Two nights later on this same tour, one fan stabbed a man to death—the local paper blamed the murder on the musicians playing that night by claiming their bands’ names and lyrics encouraged the deadly violence that took place (Ruth 2005).

Even though Southern rock musicians glorify drunken aggression with their lyrics, in interviews, most argued their music neither causes nor promotes drinking or violence. One musician explained “you can scapegoat any type of music to be responsible for binge drinking because of the atmosphere people tend to listen to you: in bars or clubs. But it’s the individual that’s listening to it has the responsibility on how they drink; it’s not the music’s fault.” Another informant suggests the argument music causes violence is backwards or that aggressive people (like rebel men) are attracted to violent music:

I don’t think music has anything to do with driving people over the edge. If someone’s crazy, they’re gonna do what they’re gonna do. They may be drawn to a certain music, but music isn’t gonna push them some way.

Only one informant thought music could cause violence, although he argues the aggression is not innate to the songs but results when Southern rockers play the wrong type of music for rebel men.

I think it always depends on alcohol intake and if somebody is going to lose their mind or not. But I have seen music really piss off some of those big rednecks who just took the biggest offense in the world from the hard rock shit. So we’ve been beaten up over our set and fought with a lot of people through the years on doing it. I guess music can bring out some rage.
Thus, while many Southern rockers sing about violence and rebel men regularly fight at concerts, musicians do not take responsibility for this drunken aggression.

Instead of arguing their music promotes drunken aggression, most musicians claim they simply reflect the violence and drinking inherent to our culture—which would include the alcohol and aggression innate to hegemonic masculinity. One informant says, “I think my music is more of a reflection of society. We live in a violent culture, and we’ve always been a violent culture, let’s face it.” Another similarly responded:

I think my music just reflects drinking, I don’t think it promotes it. If you listen to any song by any artist that most people are talking about, like George Jones talking about getting drunk, I wouldn’t think that would promote it too much but just describe what people do anyways.

One musician told me he wrote a song about the violence others (perhaps other rebel men) subject him to: “I don’t go looking for trouble but sometimes it follows me and I guess that’s what that song is about at its root.” Another explains that while his music is based on his own experiences, he exaggerates as an artist so his songs do not reflect his personality: “I’m not a violent person at all. I don’t even have a gun. But I use metaphors and stuff, and on my first album we were trying to be as crazy as possible.” Thus, while many Southern rockers write about drunken violence, few claim their songs celebrate this aggression; rather, musicians argue they use artistic embellishments to reflect the drinking and violence inherent to our culture.

While most middle-class men and women consider fighting deviant, rebel men’s drunken violence is indicative of the aggression innate to the hegemonic masculinity men across the class spectrum share. Thus, rebels resemble other marginalized groups of men who abuse alcohol and fight to signify the hegemonic empowerment men of all classes idealize (Tomsen 1997). Rebel men use drinking both as an excuse for aggressive behavior and as a masculinity-affirming, risk-taking endeavor because alcohol so frequently results in the physical confrontations equated with hegemonic domination and men’s masculine willingness they always be ready to defend themselves (Johnson [1997] 2005; Kaufman 1998). Similar to the highly celebrated athletes who affirm masculinity through the hegemonic aggression, risk taking, and competition of sports (Messner 2002; Messner and Sabo 1990); rebels expose themselves to physical challenges and injuries to signify the hegemonic masculine selves through trials of strength, courage, and toughness.
However, much like the European “football hooligans” who travel alongside their hometown soccer teams to drink and brawl in the streets with fans from rival towns (Armstrong 1998), rebel men do not compete on socially legitimate fields, courts, rings, or arenas.

Drug Use

Rebel men signify hegemonic masculine independence by using drugs to protest legal-normative standards. Southern rock musicians construct user-selves by showing drug imagery on Southern rock websites, album covers, clothing, and tattoos. Nashville Pussy pictures one scantily-clad female band member inhaling marijuana smoke from another female band member’s mouth on the back of their “High as Hell” album, a title that also implies overindulgence in drugs. Hank Williams III almost always wears a vest with a marijuana leaf patch sewn on the chest—a patch that complements the pot leaf tattooed on his arm. For their band logo, Joecephus & the George Jonestown Massacre combine drugs with a celebration of “Southernness” by replacing the stars of a Tennessee-shaped confederate flag with marijuana leaves.

While I witnessed public drug use at only one Southern rock show, rebels openly celebrate substances at concerts. Just as they request drinks from the crowd, musicians also ask audiences to provide drugs. For example, one band asked if “anyone could help them be up all night” while another offered to play song requests for “green donations not of the monetary kind.” Another band member added “we would like to take about an eighth of an ounce of requests.” Before playing his coded song “Sack,” Willie Heath Neal confirms he wrote the tune while “waiting for a bag of weed to show up.” On his live album, Neal tells the crowd “I hate cocaine, but I love the way it smells.” During participant observation, multiple musicians offered me drugs—one band manager asked me if I could secure “pills.”

In interviews, many musicians affirmed themselves as users. One respondent, visibly ill from over-indulgence the previous evening, apologized for his condition and then jokingly told me “I don’t know how that cocaine gets up my nose.” Another drew on the rebel masculine tenet of alcohol and violence to explain why he prefers drugs to drinking: “I like to smoke reefer and I like to drink too, but when I really get drunk, the fact is, I can’t handle it.” A musician even told me he especially enjoys touring in Europe because promoters consider it common courtesy to provide musicians with drugs.
Many Southern rock songs celebrate drugs as a compensatory manhood act. Bob Wayne’s lyrics, which he also printed on the back of a T-shirt, glorify a “meth-snorting, truck-driving, American hero.” The Reverend Horton Heat’s “Bales of Cocaine” tells the first-person account of a farmer who becomes a millionaire after finding and selling a large amount of drugs. In “Going to the Show,” J.B. Beverly sings of “twisting one (a marijuana cigarette) up” before a concert because he “needs some honky-tonking and some rock-n-roll.” In “Crazed Country Rebel,” Hank Williams III mentions six different drugs he uses during a four-day binge: “grass” (marijuana), “acid” (LSD), “morphine,” “H” (heroin), “blow” (cocaine), and “mushroom tea” (a way to prepare hallucinogenic mushrooms). Even two musicians who privately told me they refrain from using because of past problems with addiction glorify drugs both from the stage and through their songs.

Informants provided varied responses when I asked if they promoted drug use through their music. Only one musician proudly declared his role in persuading some fans to use:

Well yeah, I promote a certain amount of drug use for fuck sure man. I would tell the average person you got to do a certain amount of that shit. I wouldn’t tell someone who is 15 years old they should go try acid because they would probably freak out. And some people shouldn’t. I know some people because they are straight, they get more shit done. They start taking drugs, it’ll set them back. So I don’t want to hurt anyone that’s for damn sure. But yeah, I would promote drug use, fuck it.

However, most musicians argue much like their lyrical depictions of drunken aggression, their portrayal of drugs is an expression of the world as they see it. For example, one informant describes a song of his as “not about being evil; it’s about doing drugs and living wrong. We live in an ugly fucking world, and my job as an artist is to portray it, to reflect, throw it right back in your fucking face.”

Musicians also admit while they base their songs about drugs on reality, they also exaggerate. One informant explains:

We have a song that on the very surface implies how great cocaine is. But when people hear it they won’t just like look at the surface and say, “Yeah, wow, cocaine’s great.” I trust that they’re smart enough to look deeper into the deal, saying “isn’t that funny he’s got this song about
how great something that’s really fucked up and terrible is.” It’s a twisted sense of humor deal.

Another musician echoes these sentiments by claiming because he openly exaggerates in his songs about drugs, fans who follow his words deserve the consequences: “If someone’s that stupid to do the shit that’s in my songs, it’s a matter of survival of the fittest. Anyone living his life is like any of my songs; it’s their fucking fault, not mine.”

Even musicians who present themselves as exemplars of rebel masculinity describe their actual drug use as more limited than their songs and public personas imply. For example, one informant explained how touring is hard work by proclaiming “it’s not all strippers and cocaine.” When wrapping up an interview, one Southern rocker told me why he and his band now avoid a common acquaintance because our friend offers musicians too many drugs: “He made us do a lot of dope one night and after that we didn’t really hang out with him anymore.” Two other musicians use more strategic identity work strategies to explain that while they refrain from partying, they still signified rebel masculinity by boasting of their sexual conquests. When I asked one informant what he likes best about touring he explained:

I like seeing the country and the different women. I’m sober, so it’s all I got. I just make love; I don’t drink or do drugs anymore. Everyone else is party animals, but I wouldn’t be able to this if I did because I’m crazy when I get drunk. So I’ve gone three and a half years without no alcohol and no drugs.

Similarly, another musician explained while on tour “I don’t party a lot, it’s not all about partying. I mean, I’m not going to pass up the chance to get laid, but that’s not why I’m doing it.” Thus, while fans hold up musicians as exemplars of rebel masculinity because of the prolific drug use they describe in song and from the stage, in reality many musicians do not live up to their self-proclaimed rebel ideals because they carefully moderate their substance use in order to keep up with the rigors of touring.

**Protesting Authority and Risk Taking**

While informants admit they exaggerate about drinking, fighting, and using drugs in their songs, both Southern rock musicians and their fans engage in these behaviors on a semiregular basis. Thus, rebel men subject themselves to the repercussions of their compensatory manhood acts as even one iso-
lated and seemingly innocent incident can have negative, life-changing consequences. For example, one informant explains why he, like many musicians who cannot secure passports because of their criminal records, can no longer perform outside the United States:

Yeah, they won’t let me into Canada. They told me last time I went there at 3:00 in the morning. I was smoking a joint and I put the roach in a soda pop can. They busted my ass going across the border to a $10,000 fucking gig for a fucking roach. They told me that I obviously had to learn my lesson, so I couldn’t get into their country.

Another describes canceling a tour because of legal trouble: “I was on probation, and got a letter from the department of parole and probation that was signed by a judge saying that I wasn’t allowed to leave the state.” However, rebels incorporate the repercussions of their compensatory manhood acts into identity work strategies that signify hegemonic masculinity by boasting of their deviance and punishments. For example, in our interview, one musician proudly professed: “I’ve been to jail, not once, not twice, but several fucking times,” although he did add “but I’m not a bad guy.”

Rebel men also use entanglements with the criminal justice system as opportunities to protest authority. Wayne Hancock boasts of his past arrests for possession from the stage, and his song “Johnny Law” chastises a “bull” police officer for having “the biggest attitude I ever saw.” In “Ain’t Your Business,” Nashville Pussy tells a “pig” his “badge don’t make him the boss.” Bob Wayne’s song “Fuck the Law” literally connects criminality to masculinity with the lyrics: “Now what kind of man would I be if I just laid down and let the law walk over me, what kind of message would that send to all of my friends who still have some hope that we’re free?” In “Before They Get Those Cuffs on Me,” J.B. Beverly sings about “facing lots of time” after assaulting a bank teller, killing a police officer, and threatening to do the same to the judge who initiated this violent series of events by issuing an arrest warrant. Unknown Hinson, who claims to have spent more than thirty years in prison for a crime he did not commit, told Steel Bender Magazine the trial judge extended his original sentence because he taunted the court after a guilty verdict. With these protests of the law, rebel men empower their masculine selves by defying authority and symbolically asserting their hegemonic masculine independence.

However, rebels’ arrests and incarcerations are only some of the many negative consequences of compensatory manhood acts; Southern rock musicians also sing about destroyed relationships, addiction, injuries, and even
death. In “Those Pills I Took,” Hank Williams III and Those Poor Bastards describe the aftermath of a drug binge: “blood on the carpet,” “broken mirrors,” and “somebody crying.” In their song “Pray for the Devil,” Nashville Pussy claims Satan has more chance at redemption than an incarcerated addict. Like many Southern rock songs, this tune portrays a female as the helpless victim of drugs, thereby feminizing addiction and equating substance abuse problems with weakness. Because rebel men equate dependence with weakness, Southern rockers only discuss their addictions in the past tense, such as when Joe Buck and Bob Wayne sing about how their past heroin abuse almost killed them. With this identity work strategy, rebel men signify their masculine selves as both experienced users and strong enough to overcome addiction.

Southern rockers create a contradiction as they celebrate drugs while highlighting the negative consequences of substance abuse. However, one can reconcile this contradiction by contextualizing compensatory manhood acts into hegemonic masculine ideals. When rebels combine a glorification of drugs with cautionary tales about their dangers, they affirm personal courage and signify the hegemonic risk taking. Similar to Southern rockers’ glorification of the dangers of drinking and violence, rebels’ recognition of the hazards of substances combined with celebrations of use signifies hegemonic masculinity by affirming rebel men’s ready willingness to confront a variety of hazards including health problems (Courtenay 2000; Schwalbe 2009) and entanglements with the criminal justice system (Messerschmidt 1993).

**Discussion**

Economically disenfranchised men find themselves in a precarious situation as cultural expectations pressure all males to adhere to hegemonic masculine ideals, yet marginalized men lack the resources and authority most men use to signify manhood. In this study, I reveal how rebel men compensate for their marginal class status by using a variety of identity work strategies to signify hegemonic masculine selves. Rebel men highlight their hegemonic masculine independence by rejecting the responsibilities of being students, workers, husbands, and fathers. Rebels also symbolically empower their masculine selves by protesting those in positions of authority, including bosses, teachers, politicians, judges and law enforcement officers. Rebels further claim hegemonic power by exploiting women’s labor and bodies. Additionally, rebel men empower their hegemonic masculine selves and protest middle-class conventions using compensatory manhood acts including drinking, taking drugs, and fighting.
While rebel manhood enables marginalized men to signify hegemonic ideals, in practice, Southern rebelliousness reinforces inequality by strengthening the very socioeconomic disadvantages that compel marginalized men to seek a rebel identity in the first place. By rejecting work and education, rebel men abandon the already limited opportunities for upward mobility in the new global economy. Rebels’ dismissal of domestic partnerships to remain proudly autonomous means rebel men forgo more than intimacy as they also sacrifice the basic economic and social support many men and women use as a cooperative foundation to better their economic circumstances (Gerson 1993). I witnessed how compensatory manhood acts leave rebels broke and even homeless as they squander their limited resources on substances. I also saw rebel men left ill, injured, and facing mountains of medical debt after addictions and fights; others confront a lifetime of formal stigma because of entanglements with the criminal justice system.

While some might overlook the importance and influence of the Southern rebel identity by dismissing Southern rockers as a marginal subculture, the musicians I examined in this study are part of an ongoing, multigenre, U.S. musical tradition that has celebrated Southern men as quintessential exemplars of American manhood for almost a century. For instance, even the softened, popular country from Nashville retains a cultural connection to the rebellious individualism of rural, usually Southern, lower-class males (Ching 2001; Eastman 2010; Fox 2004; Jensen 1998; Malone 2006; Peterson 1997). Thus, the rebel masculine identity has great appeal and popularity well beyond the Southern rock revival and even the Southern region itself as men from across the country (and even the world) risk the consequences of rebel manhood in order to empower their hegemonic masculine selves.

Given the widespread notoriety of rebel manhood, many in the United States stereotype Southern men as backwards and deviant because of the ways rebels protest middle-class conventions and use compensatory manhood acts to signify hegemonic masculine ideals. However, when I contextualize the Southern identity into hegemonic masculine ideals, I reveal that rebel men simply use alternative identity work strategies to signify the same ideal tenets of manhood shared by most men across all social classes and regions. Perhaps Americans contrarily consider the South (especially as expressed in music) unique and deviant, yet somehow also central to the U.S. cultural landscape partially because Southern men exemplify identity work strategies that help disempowered males all across the country signify the hegemonic masculine ideals shared by all men.

Of course, while I saw men all across the country claim a Southern identity, because musicians exaggerate and idealize rebel manhood, few if any
men could fully embody the Southern rebel identity as it is depicted in music. In fact, my data show that even Southern rock musicians who subsist mostly unrestrained by family and jobs do not fully embody the rebel masculine ideals their songs and stage personas imply. However, even if the vast majority of disempowered men who listen to Southern music only use rebel manhood as a symbolic, cathartic release, the widespread popularity of rebel manhood still reinforces and perpetuates social inequalities through the social construction of the poor more generally. For example, rebels’ protests of education and work reinforce stereotypes of the lower classes as morally and intellectually inferior or as responsible for their poverty because they lack motivation and intelligence. Men and women committed to their families will likely interpret rebel men’s abandonment of wives and children as stemming from a lack of family values, leading many to blame the poor overall for many family breakdowns that actually occur because of economic stress. In celebrating substances, rebel men reinforce the social construction of the poor as alcoholics or drug addicts and therefore personally responsible and deserving of both their poverty and over-representation in the criminal justice system. The aggression of rebel manhood will increase fears of violence and further undermine compassion for the marginalized and disenfranchised. Thus, rebel men perpetuate stereotypes that could even result in institutional practices that exacerbate inequality, such as overpolicing and punishing the deviance of the poor, undermining social programs, or outsourcing jobs to other countries instead of investing in American workers (Schwalbe 2008).

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**Bio**

**Jason T. Eastman** received his PhD in sociology from The Florida State University and is currently an assistant professor at Coastal Carolina University. He researches how racial, class and gender inequalities are reproduced through identity and culture, often by drawing upon his experiences as a former musician in his studies on music.