

THESIS

GENDER PERFORMANCE AND THE HYPER-FEMINIZED COWGIRL: A CTDA
ANALYSIS OF THE @WPRARODEO TIK TOK

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

GENDER PERFORMANCE AND THE HYPER-FEMINIZED COWGIRL: A CTDA ANALYSIS OF THE @WPRARODEO TIK TOK

This study evaluates the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association TikTok as a social media platform that uses video to represent rodeo culture and portrays the cowgirl identity. This representation is centered within a male-dominant sport that falls under the agriculture industry and is rooted in other agriculture practices and history. It is important to understand how this androcentric experience in professional rodeo functions on social media through the @wprarodeo TikTok because social media representation in different forms is used to construct and reconstruct culturally situated identities. Using CTDA (Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis) this study found three cultural ideologies including: the cowgirl appearance, athletic performance, and women empowerment through collective identity, which are present on the @wprarodeo TikTok as a representation of female narratives in professional rodeo, which are bolstered through Tik Tok’s affordances. Tik Tok in an increasingly integrated digital space with highly intuitive user-based content and interaction.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Professional rodeo, in the United States, is exceedingly male dominant. Women in professional rodeo have been historically marginalized and as a result, must be exceptionally talented, beautiful, and hard working to be recognized for their accomplishments and fit into rodeo culture. A rodeo is a collection of events in which competitors showcase their skills against one another and in this case, to earn money by winning. An event in rodeo includes a particular skill that is tested in competition format including rough stock (bull/bronc riding) and timed events (roping events and barrel racing). Currently the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) has six male dominant events in each single rodeo, but the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) has only one to two women dominated events in each single rodeo.

As a part of agriculture that exemplifies the gendered experience of women, the sport of professional rodeo intertwines the practice of raising livestock for multiple purposes, as well as incorporates a business model with sponsorship-based funding and partnerships with all types of western companies who support the sport. Rodeo is often used as a secondary income for ranchers, farmers, and other people in the agriculture industry. Rodeo has a unique position within agriculture because while it is supported by agricultural business and rooted in western culture and practice, it is a main point of connection between agriculture and people outside of the industry. This connection is built through the ways the sport is promoted and displayed for fans to see in real life and increasingly in digital spaces. This connection allows for outsiders to peer into the industry through digital platforms that host rodeo content for different types of

viewers. Due to the nature of professional sports as a fan experience, rodeo, like other sports, relies on fans buying into events as well as supporting them on social media to be successful.

In recent years, professional rodeo has taken to digital media platforms to promote and connect itself with the public and fans through the creation of accounts such as @wprarodeo and @prcarodeo on Tik Tok. These online portrayals perpetuate traditional gender roles as they are culturally situated with the overall cowgirl identity. This identity is built around the idea of an inherently strong woman with very feminine characteristics. The cowgirl is supposed to be durable and tough while also an object of desire through poised appearance, personality, and action. Today's athletes of professional rodeo portray themselves through feminine characteristics including hair, makeup, clothing, and equipment; most of which are associated with trends set by western brands and social adherence to those trends. Women in rodeo are also subject to the regulations of appearance through a dress code as put out by the WPRA (Women's Professional Rodeo Association, 2022). Both these rule-based practices of the cowgirl and the socially grounded expectations can be seen in digital spaces. Additionally, women's physical performance is demonstrated on digital platforms in relation to their gendered experience. The representations of women in such accounts influence both perceptions of rodeo and of the agriculture industry. The cowgirl performance on the WPRA Tik Tok calls attention to cultural values of rodeo, which reinforce women as having to fit a certain standard based on traditional heteronormative roles in western and US culture. Women historically in the US have served in caretaking and background roles. These are rooted in the discrimination of women and women of color, being less educated, having less money, and traditionally relying on powerful men for survival (Butler, 2009). This integration of the marginalization of women in politics and western culture is important to acknowledge to understand how the gender experience is constructed.

1.1 Overviews and Rationales

Professional rodeo, like many other sports, is heavily dominated by and centered on the male experience, and there is limited research on gender and representations of rodeo in digital media. Not only is this proposed research relevant to the agricultural industry but also to other important topics such as the role of female athletes on social media and the role of professional sports organizations in the display of their athletes on social media. The nuance of rodeo as an entertainment adaptation of agriculture fits into greater research both on agricultural communications and on gender studies in digital media more broadly. The creation of social media accounts by professional rodeo is another layer of rodeo to fan interaction that now exists in new spaces. Tik Tok accounts such as @wprarodeo have a large audience and use video, sound effects, music, and text to portray women in professional rodeo, which tells the narrative of their experience. Tik Tok is a newer social media platform that has unique circulation characteristics that allow it to reach diverse audiences because it displays content not based on who a user follows or in a linear way but rather through an interest-based algorithm when a user uses the ‘for you’ page (Zhang & Liu, 2021). With Tik Tok being a newer platform for the WPRA, it is a space for new and younger audiences to interact with rodeo content on one of the most popular social media platforms to date (Miltsov, 2022). Tik Tok’s audience base in the US has around 35% of users who are under the age of 19 and began with around 800 million monthly users (Montag et al., 2021). Since, it has grown to nearly 1 billion active users (Doyle, 2023). With the popularity of the platform growing, content from Tik Tok is also being

integrated into other platforms making it a transversal social media platform reaching extensive amounts of audiences.

1.2 Organization of Theory

Women in rodeo have a marginalized positionality in agriculture and rodeo. Cowgirls in rodeo were originally meant to provide amusing entertainment for admiring crowds in the form of trick roping¹, ²trick riding, and roman racing ³(LeCompte, 2000). These events were more



Figure 1: Tillie Baldwin, National Cowgirl Hall of Fame Website, 2017

subjective in nature rather than rule-based, meaning the judges and fans were drawn to events that were entertaining and had good performance value. Early renditions of the cowgirl were feminized and maintained the notion that women served in their roles beneath their male

¹ From historical Mexican vaqueros, uses soft braided rope to create tricks including twirls, spins, and elaborate dances for entertainment (Bullock Museum, 2023)
² From Turkic culture, a complex series of maneuvers including standing and hanging off horses at high speeds for entertainment and competition (Silver Spurs Rodeo, 2019).
³ From ancient Rome, where a rider stands on two horses with a foot on each and completes obstacles and maneuvers (Nicolaus, 2019).

counterparts as objects of desire for their beauty and talent. This feminization is represented in the clothes these women wore and in the gimmicks they used in their performances such as Annie Oakley's 'sharpshooter' persona used in early Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows. Oakley adopted her show name from a circus in Ohio where she created unique costuming to distinguish herself (PBS.org, 2023). Costumes and clothing included long skirts, long hair, and fringe (National Cowgirl Hall of Fame, 2017). This inherently feminine appearance was enforced through social expectations and contributed to the gendered experience of cowgirls (LeCompte, 2000).

Gender performativity theory suggests that gender is performed in unique and sometimes intentional ways that build a story about the gender experience (Butler, 2020). The gender experience is shaped by how gender influences and creates everyone's story in relation to experience. This performance is also shaped by the medium of the technology it is presented in. Women in rodeo can use the affordances of the Tik Tok platform to perform these representations of gender that fit into a larger narrative about rodeo culture and women's place in it. This visualization of gender on social media through video, sound, and story describes to viewers a detailed narrative of how cowgirls are supposed to be under the scrutiny of rodeo expectations set by social rules. These rules are unwritten but dictate how women dress, how they act, and the kinds of careers they can have. For women in US culture dominated by heteronormativity, social rules include dressing feminine using feminizes colors as well as portraying themselves as inherently 'girly' in the way they speak and act in social settings. This act includes being caregivers and falling into line with the roles of motherhood that have been historically set for women in western culture. For professional rodeo, these rules include being limited to the events that can be competed in, which are barrel racing and only recently,

breakaway roping. It is not as socially acceptable for women in rodeo to compete in other events or to not fall into the dominant western views of women described above.

In-line with narrative theory, the collective content of these Tik Tok accounts can be seen as a type of storytelling that constructs specific notions of women in rodeo that reinforce gender stereotypes. Storytelling is potentially persuasive in its portrayal of gender while reinforcing stereotypes of the cowgirl that have been defined over time because narrative allows for the understanding of social expectations to outside audiences (Oliver et. al., 2020). This reflects the cultural/social values of rodeo that may frame viewer perception and reinforce that perception. Continually, this constructs the values of women outside of rodeo too because the content is subject to the viewers application of the values in their own experience that can be more impactful in narrative form (Lane et al., 2013.) This narrative concept is also employed in feminist theory as a mechanism to discuss the positionality of women in marginalized spaces. The inequalities of women in agriculture are a point of contention in understanding how their experience is framed by their positionality. This position is often informed by complex social relationships built by common values (Ferguson, 2017).

Feminist theory bridges the concept of gender as a performance that operates as a marginalized identity and the narrative that tells that story. Who is telling the story and how they are telling it invokes the reality of women in gendered spaces because gender is influencing the individual experience (Butler, 2020). The dynamic relationships between women and the world around them are informed by many intersectional perspectives that can be shown and are influenced by the medium they exist in such as social media (Harp et. al, 2018). Women in rodeo exist in a space that is male dominated and are therefore subject to a narrative that contains elements of this marginalization displayed on social media. On the @wprarodeo Tik Tok, the

narrative of content is framed by the gendered experience of the subjects in the videos and of the technology used to produce and consume it.

1.3 Current Research

Current research in social media points to Tik Tok's unique ability to engage viewers through short videos that can engage more audiences in influential ways (Miltsov, 2022). Tik Tok also currently has a higher viewership of individual posts than other social media platforms, suggesting that representations on the platform may have broad audiences viewing the constructions of cowgirls and women in agriculture more broadly (Miltsov, 2017). Traditionally, agriculture in the media has been portrayed in traditional media including print, broadcast tv, and newspaper (Lathiya et. al, 2015). As the industry and rodeo make the transition into new social media platforms, there are more avenues for audience interaction. The WPRA has used Facebook and Instagram as their primary social media outlets. The WPRA Facebook page was created in 2010 and is still active today with just over 114,000 followers (@WomensProRodeo, 2022). The WPRA Instagram was created in 2018 and has 14.8 thousand followers (@wo, 2022). Both accounts are used to showcase competitors at rodeos throughout the season as well as promote the WPRA and their sponsors. Many of the posts document current WPRA competitors at various rodeos around the states. The @wprarodeo Tik Tok first posted on the platform in June of 2022 and now has around 80 posts with 13.7 thousand followers (@wprarodeo, 2022). With the rapid growth in a short time, Tik Tok hosts a new space for content that contains detailed representations of women in rodeo and their experience. The portrayal of both cowgirls and cowboys in digital spaces gives a direct comparison of the gender performances that may be present in rodeo culture and ones that are transferable between real and digital spaces. By conducting an analysis on how social media is being used by professional

rodeo organizations, the understanding of how gender is portrayed on social media can broaden research. It will also help rodeo professional organizations understand how their content is being circulated on social media and how audiences are interacting with it. Gender performance on social media reflects the gender performances of the real world and establishes the relationships between social values and gender expectations in the real world.

1.4 Research Questions

RQ #1: In what ways does gender performance on the Women's Professional Rodeo Association TikTok reflect and reinforce the narrative around cowgirl stereotypes?

RQ#2: How do the mechanisms of TikTok afford the ability of these narratives to align with the dominant narrative of women in rodeo?

1.5 Methods Rationale

Using CTDA (Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis) the study will evaluate the @wprarodeo (Women's Professional Rodeo Association) TikTok as a representation of gendered narratives in professional rodeo and will aim to understand how the mechanics of TikTok afford these narratives through video in an increasingly integrated digital space with highly intuitive user-based content and interaction. It is important to note the modality of Tik Tok as a platform and how the medium of delivery is often a contributor to the message. Due to the need to understand and evaluate the cultural aspects of this study, CTDA is a necessary method that can provide data taken from digital media that can be analyzed under a cultural lens. CTDA combines technology, technology practice, and discourse to understand how the three operate together to result in culturally constructed digital content and creation/use of that content. Gender as it relates to rodeo culture can be broken down into measurable pieces that can be critiqued while considering how the technology and construction of it influence the relationships between

creators, content, and user (Brock, 2016). Each of these pieces plays a role in how technology, the practice of using technology to communicate, and the content itself are interacting with each other in the given cultural context. CTDA considers all these important moving parts to contextualize gender and its role in @wprarodeo Tik Tok in the digital space.

1.6 Conclusion

The future of agriculture communications research will provide the steppingstones to understanding how professional rodeo is using social media, a relatively new technology for the sport, to reinforce or change the cowgirl identity in the male-centered world. Ultimately the broadening of the understanding of gender performance in social media gives insight into how change is initiated or potentially limited by such performances. It would be valuable for research and in practice to understand how social change forms and is enacted through the bolstering of gender performance via social media platforms. As social media grows as a platform to catalyze change for marginalized groups, researchers, practitioners, and consumers of media will need to understand the impact this has on the larger population in real life and in digital societies.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of Women in Rodeo

Women in rodeo first appeared as a form of amusement and entertainment during World War I. It wasn't until 1948 that the Girls Rodeo Association (GRA, which would eventually become the WPRA) was created to establish a formal way for women to compete in more mainstream rodeo events (LeCompte, 2000). Even after a nearly 30-year struggle to establish itself as a part of professional rodeo, the Women's Professional Rodeo Association still only holds a fraction of the events in professional rodeo that the men do. A PRCA-sanctioned rodeo (a rodeo hosted by the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association) almost always has six men's events, which are separated into two categories: rough stock and timed events. Rough stock events include bull riding, saddle bronc riding, and bronc riding. Timed events include team roping, tie-down roping, and steer wrestling. The WPRA which functions alongside the PRCA usually hosts one to two events at any rodeo performance, which are barrel racing and breakaway roping, both of which are timed events. The PRCA has the largest membership base in professional rodeo with more sanctioned events than any other rodeo organization (*Rodeo Events Explained*, Northwest Washington Fair, 2022). For this study, only the PRCA and WPRA will be examined and shall exclude other rodeo organizations including but not limited to college rodeo, high school rodeo, and other professionally sanctioned rodeo organizations. The discrepancy in the number of events between men's and women's sports results in fewer opportunities for women to compete and earn money in their season. The overall money earnings during the season determine which athletes can compete at the world finals each year with the top 15 in each event being eligible. This last competition season, the top cowboy, Stetson Wright, earned

\$758, 828 total in 2022 (prorodeo.com, 2023). The top cowgirl this season, Hailey Kinsel, won \$302,172 total in 2022 (WPRA.com, 2023).

Early cowgirls came from ranching families with low incomes and had no advanced education (LeCompte, 2000). Many of these early cowgirls were highly skilled in riding and roping but also opted to choose a rodeo stage name to perform under. The notion of a performance suggests that these athletes were seen as entertainers and defined by their performance characteristics which included using show names and using costumes to distinguish themselves from other performers. While cowgirls of today sometimes use clothing to distinguish themselves, the use of what would be considered a costume (something exotic beyond the WPRA rulebook standard for clothing) is not common and show names are not used. LeCompte notes that while the WPRA has been one of the most long-standing women's sports organizations in the world that has always been run by women, it is also very absent from the literature about women's sports (LeCompte, 2000). The history of women in rodeo is divided into three major eras, the first from the 1880's through World War I, the second, 1919-1929, was considered the golden age for women in rodeo which was followed immediately by a return to traditional ranching without rodeo competition. It wasn't until the 1950/60's that the cowgirl athletes of today began to become consistently a part of the rodeo arena with great success (LeCompte, 2000).

Women in rodeo and professional women rodeo athletes have been defined historically by their appearance and behavior. Thomas argues that early women in rodeo may have been considered 'loose' in the matter of public opinion. This was because these women were competing in rough sports that were not regarded as appropriate for women and were feared to cause reproductive health damage (Thomas, 2014). Many of the athletes of the time, including

the famous Annie Oakley, resisted that expectation claiming that being an athlete made a woman healthier and happier (Thomas, 2014). Women in early rodeo were criticized for their clothing. It was socially understood that girls wearing any sort of masculine type clothing was not acceptable but as women athletes in rodeo became more competitive, they adapted their skirts with slits to be more practical (Thomas, 2014).

This history of women's outfits and appearance in rodeo is one that was highly contested by early cowgirls and defaults to the assumption that women should dress feminine and adhere to the expectations of the social hierarchy. The cowgirl experience is consistently subject to the expectations of the times and is assumed to be more feminine than their male counterparts, even with similar clothing of today. While early renditions of cowgirls wore costume-like outfits with bright colors, skirts, and tall, wide-brimmed hats, the dress code of today's professional athletes is more reserved and adheres to current western industry trends.

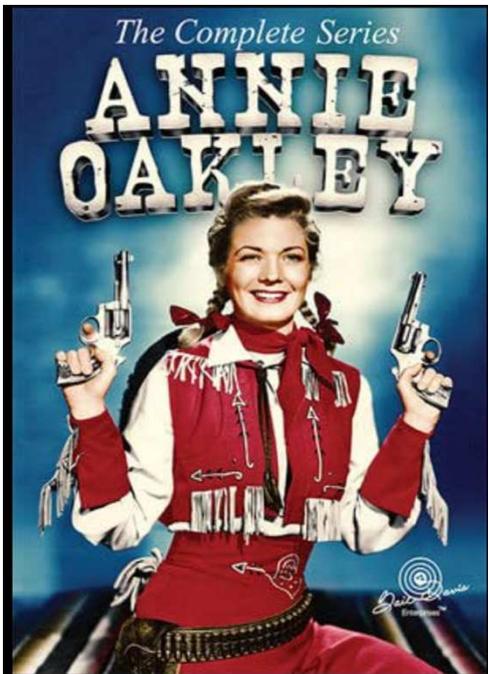


Figure 2: Cover of the Annie Oakley TV Series, Imdb.com, 2022



Figure 3: Lisa Lockhart, WPRR Competitor, Image from the @wprarodeo Instagram, 2022

The WPRA and PRCA presently have a dress code for their athletes that must be followed by competitors. If a competitor fails to be within the parameters of the dress code, they can be fined up to \$100 per violation (WPRA Rulebook, 2022). As stated in rule 9.2.3 of the official WPRA Rulebook:

“Long sleeve shirts that are collared and have either buttons or snaps on the front of the shirt, jeans without holes, western boots and western hat must be worn for all rodeo performances and slack. Contestant’s appearance must be neat, clean, and professional.” (WPRA Rulebook, 2022, Section 9.2.3).

The WPRA rule book contains rules about professionalism stating that competitors must consider that their presence must always be professional and is under the eye of rodeo fans both inside and outside the arena. The rulebook also requires competitors to be responsible for how their friends, family, or others around them behave in a professional rodeo setting. Behavior and representation is a high value of rodeo culture and is an expectation in their social values as laid out in the rulebook. A contestants’, or their family/friends, dress or behavior may be deemed unprofessional by the rodeo staff and can result in fines to the contestant (WPRA Rulebook, 2022). These written rules use vague language and suggest that the definitions of them are understood as an unspoken social expectation.

In addition to the rule-based regulations on professional rodeo athletes, there are also socially valued expectations for the cowgirl appearance. Much of the hyper-feminized parts of the cowgirl including, hair, makeup, and outfits with lots of bling, stem from features of rodeo queens at the rodeo (Stanford, 2012). Rodeo queens are ambassadors for the sport of rodeo and act as the spokeswoman for the sport (missrodeoamerica.com, 2022). While they are not usually



Figure 4: Miss Rodeo America 2022, Hailey Frederickson, taken from the @missrodeoamerica Instagram, 2022.

competitors themselves, rodeo queens set the standard for women in western clothing and appearance. Miss Rodeo America is selected each year from the previous years' state queens and is considered the 'First Lady' of rodeo. The Miss Rodeo America organization is funded entirely by sponsorships and donations from businesses and individuals in the western industry. The woman who is selected to serve as Miss Rodeo America is expected to uphold and represent the values of professional rodeo and the 'Western Way of Life' (missrodeoamerica.com, 2022). The phrase 'Western Way of Life' is used often in the rodeo industry as a collective term to describe people within rodeo with common values, however, it is not clearly defined in writing. Rather, it is an expectation that is known by people in the industry and goes unspoken as to the specific

rules of that value. The Miss Rodeo America image and reputation carry over to competitors in professional rodeo and women in the WPRA.

The expectations of who the cowgirl is and what she looks like are subject to the social values of the industry. The cowgirl body is supposed to be athletic but feminine and is often exemplified through beauty enhancements including makeup, hair extensions, hair color, and expensive clothing with lots of rhinestones/bling (Stanford, 2012). This cowgirl aesthetic has been built through many years of rodeos and is continuously evolving with the trends of the times. The WPRA gives out the Jerry Ann Taylor Best Dressed award at the National Finals Rodeo to the barrel racer who the fans have voted as the best dressed (National Cowgirl Hall of Fame, 2023). This fan interaction with cowgirls clothing adds another layer to the gendered experience as athletes attempt to appeal to social expectations to win additional money. Many rodeo queens and rodeo athletes are sponsored by western clothing brands and other agricultural-based businesses that expect their sponsees to represent them in a particular way that upholds the values of the western industry (Stoeltje, 1986). The image of the stereotypical all-American cowgirl has a nuanced narrative that contains expectations for how a woman should look, how she should act, and defines parameters she can present herself within. A woman in the western industry is expected to be poised and professional while adhering to the physical expectations including her looks being in line with popular trends. She also must be tough in the sense that she is not emotional or self-indulgent.

Data about the demographics of rodeo athletes is limited, however, professional rodeo today and historically is largely dominated by white men and women. This was also an assumption historically because cowboys were not thought of as being anything other than white in the 60's and 70's. Even though black cowboys were present in their contributions, there is little record of

their stories that are easily accessible or often brought up in literature (Glasrud & Searles, 2016). In 2020, the PRCA annual report showed that around 66% of all rodeo athletes are white with the second largest at 16% being Hispanic (PRCA, 2020). The 2021-2023 annual reports are not accessible without PRCA membership. Organized rodeo has always been informed and surrounded by whiteness, which is an important consideration for understanding the social culturally situation of the sport and its athletes. Black athletes in the sport of rodeo have limited recognition and are only beginning to emerge more prominently through various organizations whose missions seek to highlight black cowboys and cowgirls. For example, the Bill Picket Rodeo Invitational Rodeo (BPRI) is a annual event showcasing solely black rodeo athletes in rodeo competition format (Vasen, 2015). Bill Picket, whom the BPRI is named after, is considered one of the most famous black rodeo cowboys of all time and is accredited as the inventor of steer wrestling ⁴ (Pinkney, 1996). While black cowboys have been a part of the construction of rodeo events as we know them today, they are still not largely associated with mainstream rodeo. Therefore, the experience of today's rodeo athletes and rodeo culture is informed by and associated with whiteness as it is the dominating identity in rodeo.

2.2 Gender Performativity

Gender is intentionally performed in multiple ways by any individual person in a given context. Gender Performativity theory stems from the original notion of defining gender as an analytical construct to be scrutinized under the hetero-normative context. The question at hand is a simple construction of what is, and what is not, in the context of gender as a certain set of rules. Gender performativity asks, 'what is a man and what is a woman' and if these two are not the

⁴ One of the seven PRCA sanctioned rodeo events in which a cowboy, accompanied by a hazer, races down the arena to wrestle a steer to the ground as fast as possible using speed and strength, also referred to as 'bulldogging' (prorodeo.com, 2023).

only definable parameters, then the question must be what can exist beyond the rules of normative sexuality (Butler, 1990). Butler suggests that perhaps this writing of rules of gender may simply be a way of securing the dominant heterosexual hierarchy that only allows for certain constructions of gender. It is also important to note that gender is not singular. Gender is a continuous and almost ritualistic performance that adapts under the social-cultural context and is understood by the in-group of that context. (Butler, 1990).

Therefore, the context in which identities are presented, especially in the form of gender, are important to understanding the ways in which gender is intentionally performed as a part of a person's act to the world around them. If everyone is a performer, then any individual is making

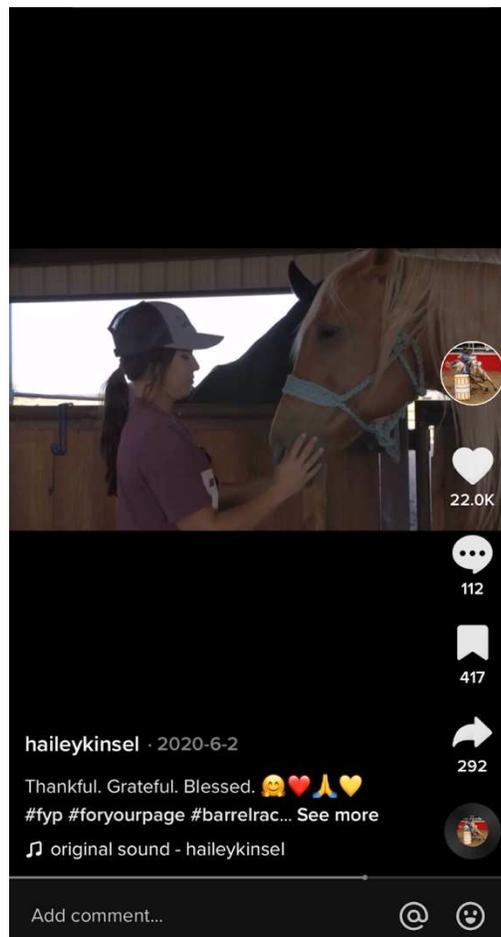


Figure 5: Hailey Kinsel, WPRA Competitor, taken from @haileykinsel Tik Tok, 2022.

decisions about what is seen and heard by the audience. For example, Hailey Kinsel, a WPRA competitor and former World Champion barrel racer, may be selective in the way she speaks, looks, or about the language posted on her Tik Tok account (@haileykinsel, 2022). The videos and content are self-regulated by Kinsel as the creator and distributor of videos of herself. In a pinned post on her Tik Tok, Kinsel posts a video of herself where the audio is her voice explaining how she wants to be remembered as a good rider and caretaker of horses by her peers. While this agency to filter what is seen first on her page is present, it is limited to the assumed values women in rodeo carry from built up, historical ideas about how cowgirls ought to be and how they should act. This is an example of how digital gender performance is adhering to the values of others to promote oneself and fit into rodeo culture.

It is considerable to understand the social expectations associated with rodeo to find patterns of gender performance that are defined in the culture. If the cowgirl is a performance as constructed and defined by the history and culture of western community, then the construction of gender is rooted in the heteronormative, male-dominated space. Cowgirls are adapting themselves to the space based on how they perceive themselves in relation to their cowboy counterparts and may therefore exemplify more feminine characteristics to adhere to the social hierarchy. This space will greatly influence the stereotypes that exist, and the ways gender is constructed and reconstructed to fit into the societal values of rodeo culture. These patterns will contribute to the understanding of how women in rodeo are constructing gender, and how it exists in the digital space as a reflection of reality. Gender as a concise division of rodeo, has become so normalized in the sport that it also tends to be similarly categorized in the minds of the public outside of rodeo (Patton & Schedlock, 2012). This confirms that the construction of

gender in rodeo fits into both the values of the sport and carries into outside groups. A process which is much quicker and accessible in the age of digital media.

In West and Zimmerman's *Doing Gender*, they argue the importance of analyzing gender as an independent part of sex and sexuality. As a complex part of building relationships with the world around oneself, gender operates with the other pieces but should be considered independently. This is because meaning can be attached to gender in significant historical and institutional practices that have been operationalized by a grouping of people throughout time (1987). Based on this conclusion, gender in the sport of rodeo can be performed with the autonomy of the performer but under the scrutiny of the historical positionality of women in the sport. Going beyond the sport, gender expectations in rodeo are also likely informed by grander agricultural social values as shown with Hailey Kinsel in her depiction of herself on her Tik Tok participating in agriculture beyond the rodeo arena. As a marginalized group in a male-dominant space, women in rodeo will likely perform their gender under the expectations that have been previously laid out. These expectations have likely been changed over time but historically describe the position women in rodeo fill.

As Meyerhoff points out, Butler's work also combines the relationships between linguistics and socially constructed categories like gender (Meyerhoff, 2014). Regarding language, the construction of gender through words is a defining piece of how the reality of gender is both something that is perceived by the speaker and initiated by their words (Austin, 1962). In digital spaces, language, and wording in the form of captions, music, voices, or other sounds initiates these reflections that digital media affords by hosting another dimension in which the reflection of reality is highly accessible to many people. Although Butler's gender performativity claims the existence of gender only in expression, Meyerhoff and Ehrlich suggest

the primary expression of gender is most prominent when one strays away from what is known to be their 'true' gender. Rodeo is a sport that is noted for being dangerous and requires toughness not normally associated with feminine performance, which strays away from the stereotypes assumed with women. True gender is defined as the real gender as perceived by others and that exists under the social rules of the space. The contrast of true and performed gender allows gender to be displayed in a more transparent way through the discourse between reality and the perception of that reality (2014).

If true gender exists both in reality and separately in the perception of that gender, then not only is gender performance on social media a reflection of the real world but also of the performer. Gender performance for women in rodeo on Tik Tok is therefore highly subject to the perceptions of the space and of the social expectations on Tik Tok. This complicates the content/user relationship because each user may be bringing a different set of social expectations when consuming the content.

Some scholars suggest that with the complexity of online interactions and relationships, online performance can be divided into two categories, which differentiates performances from exhibitions. The key difference is that exhibitions are an asynchronous performance, which is what users are interacting with on social media (Hogan, 2010). Social media affords creators the opportunity to be the curators of their content without being in real-time with their audience. As Bullingham & Vasconcelos point out, in digital spaces, users can use the affordances of the space to project their in-person self but are afforded the power to edit parts they wish to display online (2013). With the ability to police what is and is not seen on a social media account, gender performance and the subsequent editing of that performance exists in digital spaces. There is a contrast between the persona that is created online, which reflects reality in the sense that both

the online and offline self-represent the person but in entirely different contexts (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013).

Online spaces are not always synonymous between performers and the audience, which is why the distinction between the different performance interactions is important. On social media platforms, creators are often interacting with their audience both in real-time and their content is circulating offline. For example, the @wprarodeo Tik Tok may respond to a comment on a video acting in real-time or a viewer may see a video post from the account a few hours or even days after it was posted. This layer of the digital space gives more opportunities for performers to tailor their act on social media to a larger audience. For women in rodeo, this opens avenues for high volume of audience engagement with perhaps a selective gender performance. A performer may enact specific ways of being through their language, appearance, and interaction based on what is assumed to be acceptable for their gender (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). Together these concepts identify the parts of social media and gender where content is created through selective performance that appeals to gender norms and stereotypes.

The concept of gender as a performance is gender as selective and adaptive. Gender as a classification based on the rules and norms of a particular social space, is a point of analysis that provides insight into the space it exists in. For women in rodeo, the inherent marginalization and historical positionality may influence the ways gender is performed. This performance exists both in real and digital spaces.

Gender performance is also inherently framed by the organization of the space around it in the sense that gender materializes in patterned spaces (Tyler & Cohen, 2010). In other words, gender performance is subject to the adaptations of itself in socially constructed spaces that are different from one another. Each space may have a unique adaptation of the gender performance.

Therefore, the complexity of online space ensures a separate gender performance under the conditions of digitality. Additionally, the gender performance of cowgirls in rodeo space is particularistic both in real rodeo spaces and in the online space of Tik Tok. The digital space is an additive part of gender construction that materializes gender embodiment in the digital space and furthermore that gender also heavily informs these spaces (van Doorn, 2011). The discourse between reality and digital, is continuously changing around the constructions of gender and subsequent perceptions in different spaces. These spaces may influence and impact how an individual plays into specific gender roles by appealing to social values (Sallee & Harris, 2011). If gender is both defined by and defines a space, then it is an important part of how social media affords and allows the construction of gender. For women in rodeo, there may be a level of expectation to appeal to the historical stereotypes of the cowgirl to fit themselves into the larger rodeo culture both in real life and in digital spaces. For this project, patterns of gender will surface as identifiable constructions of the social adherence to gender expectations in agriculture.

2.3 Gender Performance of the Body

To expand Butler's gender performativity, the aspect of body performance and inherent feminine characteristics of women must be considered. Butler notes that the question about lifting gender performance off solely textual expression needs to be answered to fully conduct a critical analysis of gender as it exists in a specific situation (Butler, 2011). Ultimately the conclusion of bodily representations, is that power, as it governs the hegemonic process of body performance, has an influence on the ways in which bodies are performed in relation to socially assumed expectations. Further, this process becomes habitual and unconscious as a part of physically placing oneself in social situations (Butler, 2011). As Caudwell points out, the

performance of gender can include the ways gender is represented in physical ways including shapes and gestures of the physical body (Caudwell, 2006). Identifiable performances of the body will appear in digital spaces because of the culturally situated cowgirls on the @wprarodeo Tik Tok that can be further points of analysis.

There is tension between women in agriculture and the inherent expected masculine physicality necessary in the industry. Both in fictional media and in-real-life portrayals of women in agriculture depict the necessary masculine characteristics needed to be successful in traditional farming practices. In one study, a woman's success in a livestock sale required her to be able recreate and produce performances that are inherently masculine (Pilgeram, 2007). This performance of the body in a male-dominated space is influenced by the individual perception of the woman and what she believes to be expected of her to be successful in the space. In this case, physical strength, and the ability to be tough in the livestock industry were cultural players that defined the need for masculine performances, which were given to convince the greater social group of the woman's ability to be successful in the space.

An important part of the gender performance for female rodeo athletes is the performance as enacted through the female body, which can be viewed through other sports as well. As previously mentioned, women in rodeo and agriculture more broadly in the culture of agriculture are known to be and expected to be strong and tough, both of which are applied physically and mentally. While research on women rodeo athletes and social media specifically is nearly non-existent, other material on women athletes for other sports on social media platforms draws conclusions to how social media allows the production of online gendered performance through physical sport. For this paper, the following section will mostly highlight women in sports that are traditionally done by men and recognized as so. When possible, it will also highlight studies

which deal with non-team-based sports to reflect the practice of rodeo as an individual sport where athletes compete for themselves.

Female apologetic behavior has been defined as online behavior that exemplifies feminine characteristics. This behavior is usually a response to push against the expectation of masculine behaviors normally associated with women in contact sports. Hardy finds that although this behavior can be endorsed by the media, most participants, who in this case were female rugby players, did not engage in the behavior (Hardy, 2017). This suggests that while it is understood that women in sports face stereotypes about being inherently masculine because of their sport, they do not necessarily use their social media outreach to forcefully push against these stereotypes. Therefore, social media that shows representations of women in sports may be reinforcing the dominant stereotypes regardless of intention or reality.

Some scholars have argued that gender experience and the subsequent performance of that gender is subject to the individual experience. A study done on female professional snowboarders concludes that the ability to reflexively understand positionality based on gender expectations depends on relational experiences with people surrounding the sport. A female snowboarder may use her freedoms to push against gender assumptions or to redefine femininity in snowboarding, but it is understood that these freedoms are highly regulated by social dictations (Thorpe, 2009). For women in professional rodeo and sports more broadly, while the power to choose certain gendered performances may be present, they are informed by the understanding of how their gender fits into their sport as defined by experience.

Basque Pelota,⁵ another traditionally male-dominated sport, has women athletes who are subject to the reinforcement of binary gender systems that place men as the powerful, more able

⁵ Popular with European and Latin American countries, Basque Pelota is a high-speed variation of a racket sport played against a wall with players hitting the ball to and from the wall target (Encyclopedia of Sports, 2023).

players of the sport. However, one study shows that while many players take part in the reinforcement of these identities, some use alternative identities to push against expectations. This reconstruction of gender through physical sport is a progressive act, which leaves space for women in sports to initiate change in gender equity (Fernandez-Lasa et. al, 2021). Women in male-dominate sports are expected to be physically powerful, but still less powerful than their male counterparts, which has a drastic impact on the ways women in sports are seen and treated. The argument could be made that because of their inferior physical ability, women in a male-dominated sport are less valuable or fall out of the social expectations of what is feminine.

For women in rodeo the gendered experience is not only one that is historically present but is also presently exploited through the separation of divisions for men and women in the sport. Not only do men and women not traditionally compete against each other in rodeo events but they simply do not participate in the opposing genders' events. Women in professional rodeo express their physical body in different ways than men do in rodeo as women's events are physically different and some may say, less physically challenging in terms of strength.

2.4 Narrative Theory & Storytelling

Narrative theory bridges the concept of gender performance as an intentional story in the digital space to explain what a story is, who is telling it, and why. The story is important and frames the way people view a subject or concept. Narrative in narrative theory has been described as “somebody telling somebody else, on some occasion, and for some purposes, that something happened to someone or something” (Herman, 2012, p.3). It has also been described as a communicative form that carries a sequence that is identifiable (Georgakopoulou, 2020). Other words point to narrative as a mechanism of human communication that goes beyond storytelling. Narrative is also a way of knowing and translating knowledge between people

(Richardson, 2000). Although early concepts of narrative were mostly the way of storytelling, it is also important to understand how the story is told as a mechanism of discourse (O'Neill, 1996). As a way of knowing and a mechanism of understanding human communication, narrative is an important function of how different subjects of the world engage with one another. Narrative has also been described in research as, “an efficient pathway into emotional and cognitive domains” (Wirth, 1996, p.180). This ability for narrative to delve into the mental processes associated with persuasion, makes it a valuable way to understand how viewers can be affected.

Narrative theory supports the perspective that by telling stories on social media, creators are creating and recreating the story of reality and how it functions in any given context. On Tik Tok, the story of women in rodeo is created and the narrative about their experiences is built into the message being sent to audiences. This message is communicative and sequentially tells a story about women in rodeo in each context that reinforces the already existing expectations viewers may have of what a cowgirl is and should be.

Narrative in the digital space has become an integrated part of viewing content online. As narrative scholarship made a transition to the analysis of social media, forms of analysis including small stories research, born out of sociolinguistics, emerged to understand how narrow form storytelling fit into larger scopes of the world (Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012). Small stories narrative research considers the restraints and new freedoms social media may provide for storytellers and their interactions with various audiences in the digital space. Even in these small stories, narrative offers a way to understand social situations and expectations (Oliver et. al., 2020).

The specifics around the story being told by women in rodeo are presented on Tik Tok using the affordance of the platform while also adhering to the experience of the storyteller. Tik Tok uses short videos that tell a selective piece of any story and usually leave out the entire story. A video on @wprarodeo Tik Tok may be highly complex with multiple components, or it may be simple and concise. This short story format will showcase a limited story that is constructed by the creator that builds a picture of rodeo through the experience of women. While narrative and storytelling have deep history, the digital age brings in new components. In the age of social media, the dynamic digital space allows for user interactivity and influence on the storytelling process. Narrative has become quantifiable in the digital space in the ways stories exist. Stories are dynamic, circulating, and contain measurable numeric in the form of views, likes, or other interactions. Furthermore, these recurring interactions increase user interactivity and consistency of interaction (Georgakopoulou, 2020). In other words, the storytelling aspect of social media, facilitated by the platform, encourages users to engage for longer and to connect the values of the stories to the subjects they are seeing.

As women in rodeo are telling their unique stories on Tik Tok, there is also a piece of that story that resonates with audiences that defines how they view rodeo and agriculture. Narrative, as a powerful storytelling tool with many moving parts in the digital space, may influence audience interaction by moving audiences through content in definitive ways. Therefore, attitudes toward the cowgirl identity as it exists online may translate into the real world and be reinforced over time through multiple content interactions.

The use of narrative in digital spaces include many new mechanisms for audiences to interact with storytelling. As Lundby points out, the digitization of storytelling exists mostly in short form and can be done by anyone (2009). There is a larger group of content creators that are

making their unique story in the digital space. In past research, narrative theory aids in understanding how behavior can be influenced by mental processing of information in the form of storytelling. Franz describes narrative as ‘a catalyst for change’ as it makes information more accessible and personable (Franz, 2016). Teng et al. displayed the use of narrative theory in social media studies as much more common than before and addressed the use of narrative in marketing strategy on social media (Teng et al., 2014). Both concepts in narrative research point towards narrative as an influential and defining part of social media messaging. As Lane et al. suggest, this is important because exposure to narrative is often more impactful and persuasive than non-narrative information (Lane et al., 2013).

If narrative is an influential part of how social media interacts with its users, then Tik Tok is providing a platform for powerful narrative stories. These stories as told by women in rodeo are perhaps the catalyst Franz describes for recreating the cowgirl identity. Social media allows niche topics such as rodeo to fall onto the pages of people outside the industry who may not have previous notions of who the cowgirl is but are able to form perceptions using online content they interact with. Therefore, narrative by cowgirls on Tik Tok is creating a story that can influence how they are being perceived regardless of what may or may not be real.

2.5 Feminist Theory: Through the Eyes of Women

The notion of what makes a cowgirl and what makes a woman is one that is grown out of a long history and narrative of classifying the cowgirl under the heteronormative hierarchy of agriculture and rodeo. Feminist theory suggests that women are not born a woman but rather become women as they fit themselves into the social space and are placed in a category based on social structure (Beauviour, 1974). Furthermore, intersectionality to understand complex relationships in interdisciplinary practice, contributes to how women’s positionality is

understood (Ferguson, 2017). While most women in rodeo are white, their gender as an integral part of experience and historical oppression are an important consideration. Cowgirls are often understood as being inferior physically, financially, and socially from their male counterparts and serve in the caretaking roles that happen behind the scenes. The intersection of gender and social structure plays a part in how women in rodeo exist as a part of the larger culture. The parts of gender that define being a woman are built around the relationships gender has with social and cultural values. Most feminist literature reject the idea of gender as being a part of a person's physiology and can be tied to individualistic experience (Butler, 2020).

Women in agriculture are historically situated as the caretakers and often fill in the background roles of work, family, and leisure. Their relationship with the social values around them results in their position being subject to being classified only as background roles. Rather than being only contingent on physiology, women in rodeo are defined by the roles the people around them play as well as their own. These roles are defined by both the individual and group experience.

The feminist narrative that appears in digital media may be a starting place for pushing against the stereotype's women in rodeo face. Social change and change of values happen progressively over time and that this change must involve the understanding of how women and their roles operate in an oppressed system (Hooks, 2000). Therefore, social change and the values held by those in power must be consciously addressed. There are conscious and unconscious biases that limit women's ability to reach high positions of power because the expectations are usually based on male characteristics (Chisholm-Burns et. al, 2017). These characteristics can include physical strength, perception of emotional intelligence, intelligence, and ability to provide for themselves on their own. Women are disadvantaged by the stereotypes

set by social values which pre-determine women's ability to do certain things in each space. One study on a successful woman CEO in the advertising industry, suggested that power dynamics in her life as well as her relationships with other women helped her navigate the male-dominated industry (Olsen, 2021). While this exemplifies the ability of women to navigate to places of power in a male-dominated industry, their experience is still defined and influenced by their gender.

Women in rodeo are hindered by their historical position amongst the social values carried in agriculture, which are that women often operate in the shadows of their male counterparts. However, this view is also directly contrasted with the expectations of the cowgirl which are that cowgirls are supposed to be tough and fearless. However, these stereotypes are defined by the male centered perspective, which is that even though cowgirls are tough, they still aren't as strong as their male counterparts. These stereotypes define the experience of women in rodeo, which are then transformed into online content when posted on social media. These spaces can center the experience of women in rodeo and re-define it under new social values, which opposes the dominant heteronormative value system.

Although social media provides a space for women to reconstruct their identity and push against stereotypes, it is also a space where such content is more exposed to the male audience. There have been a few notable instances where feminist movements in digital spaces have attempted to push against the heteronormative hierarchy, they also may provide more surveillance by men of women in sexualized situations (Megarry, 2017). By using social media to push against stereotypes, it opens the door for the reinforcement of male influence by facilitating an increasing circulation of hyper sexualized content for male eyes. This is important for feminist theorists because most feminist media scholarship aim to stress the importance of the

medium, in this case social media, as a mediator of gender experience, which gain meaning through communication (Harp et. al, 2018). If gender is shaped by the medium and subject to the male gaze, then social media is not only adding to the meaning of gendered content but is potentially reinforcing the stereotypes of women and their experience. In a study done about women in STEM on Instagram, the gender performance on social media was found to reinforce stereotypes of women in science (Phillips et al., 2022). Research on the gendered experience of women displayed in online spaces shows that this experience can reinforce stereotypes. However, the study also highlights that social media posts, which challenged the stereotypes of women in STEM contained higher audience engagement than those that aligned with the expectations of women in science fields (Phillips et al., 2022). Therefore, social media may be a space for women to begin reconstructing their gendered experience while pushing against stereotypes.

The transition of feminist studies onto social media creates new concern for how digital spaces are being used to enforce social hierarchies. For women in rodeo, their gendered experience may be displayed in online spaces that reinforce stereotypes about them but also could provide a platform to reconstruct the narrative of who they are. While the @wprarodeo Tik Tok provides a space for women rodeo athletes to interact with more audiences while constructing their unique story, it also allows for reinforcement of the social hierarchy, which has historically placed men in higher power. This power structure informs the digital space and facilitates the interaction between male audiences and content created by women with the intent to reconstruct gender in a positive way.

2.6 Agriculture on Social Media

Rodeo as an object of academic research is not extensively covered. Even more so, rodeo in the media and communication does not have a wide range of research. There is however a pool of research about how agriculture has started to and is using digital technologies to communicate with larger audiences. Middha & Singh suggest, “there is a trend of using social media but only for leisure and entertainment purposes” (2019, p.8). While individuals are utilizing social media for personal use, agriculture is still adapting to the uses of social media for formal communication purposes. Ruth-McSwain describes the difference between traditional media and non-traditional media platforms concluding that traditional trade media (media produced in-industry) was once the main source of production for agricultural organizations but now they rely on third party production companies to aid in media production (Ruth-McSwain, 2008). This suggests that the industry is not commonly producing its own content as much as other industries. Film has also been a point of contention for agriculture and the perceptions viewers have about the industry through traditional media. Most historical and modern depictions of agriculture on screen have been nothing more than a small glimpse and a potentially glorified version of the lifestyle leaving viewers with misconceptions about the real industry (Beam, 2017). These depictions are not surprising given that most film portrayal of agriculture is either fictional westerns or stories that only use small, exaggerated parts of agriculture to set the theme (Beam, 2014). Based on this evidence, the earlier analysis of industry research on agriculture communications rings true to current industry practices specifically in film. Attitude of the audience may be influenced by perceived transparency of agriculture media (Rumble & Irani, 2016). The use of social media to recreate the real world is a more influential form of communication than fictional portrayals.

Tik Tok as a communication platform for the Women's Professional Rodeo is a new communication channel for the sport of professional rodeo and falls outside of what has been traditionally studied in research. Not only is it a new concept for research but is also for the sport and the agriculture industry. The use of social media to communicate with rodeo fans and outside viewers opens new opportunities of unique communication. While film provides a platform for women in rodeo to potentially communicate a story to outside audiences, most film adaptations of agriculture related topics rely heavily on stereotypes and fantasized versions of the industry. This story is perhaps a direct contrast to the story being created in a social media space by rodeo cowgirls.

While some past research exists with the intent of exploring women in agriculture, little suggests an in-depth understanding of the current practices of their use of digital media platforms to create or reinforce identity. Many studies attempt to gather information on how agriculture is using different types of mass communication tools. For example, Moore et. al concludes that blogs are being used in unique ways in the agriculture industry (Moore et. al, 2015). Women are a valuable resource in agriculture but are often inhibited by gender-based discrimination barriers (Raney et. al, 2011). These barriers are both historical and presently integrated into agriculture systems. Additionally, the agriculture industry across the globe lacks the appropriate data and record of women's contributions to agriculture and are therefore unable to create sound policy. This context of women's positionality in agriculture needs to be taken into consideration for future policy making and equal representation in the industry (Raney et. al, 2011).

Women in agriculture and rodeo are subject to the historical biases of their positionality and subsequently will use those experiences to recreate their unique story online. Women's positionality in the industry and in rodeo affects the way they present themselves and their story

in real and digital spaces. The new communication tools available are providing the opportunity for such stories to be told and build on the already existing stereotypes of women in rodeo. Other investigations into agriculture research are aimed at commodifying data gathered to use for advertising. Hill et al., aimed to understand perceptions of rodeo as a sport among college students and concluded that in relation to the audience gender was not a contributing factor to the acceptance or rejection of the sport in advertising (Hill et al., 2016). While sports occupy a separate, distinct portion of media, the same principles of perception are at play. Toffoletti & Thorpe address the historical underrepresentation of women in media in sports and conclude that social media can and is being used as a tool to combat this discrimination (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). Lathaya et al., further urges that agriculture must maintain a role in social media as a tool to communicate with consumers (Lathiya et al., 2015) However, it is important to note there still exist barriers to entry for agricultural organizations and individuals to participate in social media including the lack of access to such tools (Morris & James 2017).

Rodeo as a sport is a unique part of agriculture that brings in multiple components of the industry. It is notable to understand how rodeo's positionality in agriculture and the world may affect how it is perceived on social media because viewers may already have a preconceived notion about it before seeing the content. This contributes to the way women in rodeo are potentially reconstructing or reinforcing what audiences might expect from them in the digital space. This also leaves space for these women athletes in rodeo to push against potential negative stereotypes that may exist by presenting a specific narrative of themselves and the sport while also understanding their ability to tell the story may be limited by their positionality.

Prior research in agricultural communications points towards women as a marginalized part of how the agriculture story exists and is told. While there exist many historical portrayals of agriculture

in traditional media, social media provides a more transparent space for women in rodeo to tell their story with a narrative that is informed by their historical positionality but can be pushed against in digital spaces. This recreation of the cowgirl experience through online communication informed by positionality and told through identity is not heavily researched.

2.7 Conclusion

While studies on women in rodeo on social media are limited, there is a baseline of research in the above focus areas that can guide an analysis of the @wprarodeo Tik Tok to better understand how the mechanisms of social media afford a space for women in rodeo to represent and construct the cowgirl identity. Rodeo has a unique place in agriculture in that it has personable connections between athletes and fans via digital platforms. Therefore, more and more people from outside the industry are interacting with rodeo content. Women in rodeo and their experience is shaped by the historical position of women in the sport and that experience is placed online in both intentional and socially informed ways. To understand how social media combined with the culturally significant aspects of the content work to construct the cowgirl identity and push against or lean into stereotypes, the following research questions have been posed.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

3.1 Research Objectives

The research objective of this project is to understand how Tik Tok as a popular, new social media platform, affords gender performance in the digital space and how the narratives put out by the Women's Professional Rodeo Association on Tik Tok construct and reinforce the stereotypes of the cowgirl. With women's marginalized positionality in rodeo being historically rooted in a male centric social system, social media is a space where users outside of agriculture and rodeo interact with content from the @wprarodeo account which they may be unfamiliar with. Thus, the purpose of this analysis will be to understand what types of components make up the narrative of women in rodeo through the @wprarodeo account and how this story is constructing the cowgirl identity as it aligns with or reflects the real-world narratives of women in rodeo. This analysis will broaden the understanding of how agriculture and specifically, women in rodeo, exist in digital spaces and what types of stories are being told about them to users, which may be vital to understanding how audiences are viewing gender relationships in the industry.

3.2 Research Questions

RQ #1: In what ways does gender performance on the Women's Professional Rodeo Association TikTok reflect and reinforce the narrative around cowgirl stereotypes?

RQ#2: How do the mechanisms of TikTok afford the ability of these narratives to align with the dominant narrative of women in rodeo?

3.3 Framework of the Method

Using critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA), a qualitative analysis will be used to examine the ways women in rodeo present themselves on social media. Tik Tok will be the social media platform used to understand how women in rodeo exist on social media. Tik Tok was chosen because of several factors. Tik Tok uses a unique video-based platform that enhances user interaction by encouraging users to both consume and create content. This experience becomes immersive and envelops users into new cultural and social topics (Miltsov, 2022). Video is a highly popular form of social media that is more popular than other types of content (Shutsko, 2020).

Analyzing the components of video is an important part of contextual analysis to understand how themes and patterns appear in sound, language, and visuals. Additionally, how these themes are informed by the cultural background of agriculture and rodeo. This study will analyze gender performance in the narrative that constructs the cowgirl identity. This will be a new area of research on women in rodeo on Tik Tok and can be transferable to other similar topic areas. Gender performance can appear in several ways and will be included in the data collection process by documenting occurrences of gendered language, gendered body performance through physicality, and any other significant instances. This gender performance can also include interactions between subjects in the video and other people or animals. These interactions as pointed out in feminist theory, are defining parts of the woman experience that is portrayed to the audience through Tik Tok.

This study will utilize Andre Brock's critical technocultural discourse analysis methodology to incorporate the intricacies of Tik Tok as a platform and its technological components with the cultural/social themes and concepts identified on the @wrpatrodeo page.

CTDA combines analysis of technological platforms and design with the ways the technology is used to communicate information. This information often creates meaning through the technology and the content. CTDA also accounts for dynamics at play between technology, technology practice and content meaning to understand the relationships between them. These relationships are often related to real world power dynamics and cultural understandings (Brock, 2016). This explanation of CTDA contains multiple components that make it the adequate method for analyzing the presented topic including the need to understand the role social media technology plays in creating content meaning for users. CTDA maintains that both the digital space and the technology that provides that space are important aspects of analysis.

Tik Tok as a social media platform facilitates user interaction with content using algorithms to create custom content feeds (Zhang & Liu, 2021). Tik Tok circulates postings from different creators to users who do not have to follow them to get the content because of social media algorithms that are used to build individual feeds of content (Bucher, 2019). If these algorithms are relying on user data to generate content the audience for the WPRA Tik Tok page is likely to contain both users with high levels of background in rodeo but also those who may not have a comprehensive understanding of the topic outside of social media.

There are three components of analysis for CTDA. The first is the critical analysis. Critical analysis has been described to understand power relations as they exist and are created through discourse (Hidalgo Tenorio, 2011). Essentially, critical analysis examines what relationships exist and how they have been formulated to afford power to certain people, places, or objects. Discourse analysis has been described in many different academic ways in research including a form of communication through language or symbols and can include the entire process of any communication (Hidalgo Tenorio, 2011). Where Brock's model comes into play

is the ‘technocultural’ aspect. Rather than separating technology and content, CTDA intertwines the two suggesting that they cannot exist separately. Technology and technology practice are informed by the layers of social values and the relationship of people that built them. Technology is highly integrated into the world and therefore informs experience and impacts everyday life. Digital technologies facilitate relationships and create new ways for individuals to interact with the world through friendships, professional relationships and other connections that go beyond the limits of physical space (Butler & Matook, 2015). The creation of content using technology built by cultural/social values is a two-way relationship where both have an impact on the other.

As all the functions of social media including technology, content, and users are combined, CTDA aids in the formulation and explication of relationships between digital communications and the human aspect that engulfs them both through content creation and audience engagement. CTDA also employs both interface and discourse analysis to guide the relationship building process. Interface analysis uses “artifact, practice, and belief” (Bucher, 2019, p.5) to evaluate the technology and in this case to evaluate Tik Tok as a social media platform and the ways in which users access and use it. Discourse analysis uses “the beliefs expressed by users of those interfaces/artifacts integrate symbolic, material, and discursive aspects of the ICT under examination” (p.5). This allows for the analysis to take place under cultural considerations. By applying the analysis to both the technology and the culturally informed content, a well-rounded examination of content can be done.

3.4 Explanation of the Method

The CTDA model uses data from both technology and its practices. The model considers the use of the technology as it is situated in social hierarchies and how it is used and by whom are important considerations. The ways the technology is used as a part of cultural identity impacts

the way it is used and perceived (Brock, 2020). CTDA uses interface analysis to break down the physical aspects of the technology and design, which afford the capability of users to interact. This interface includes the form the social media platform exists on, which could be smart phones, computers, or other smart devices. It also includes the application interface, which Tik Tok uses to identify itself using colors, symbols, and other graphics.

Tik Tok's social media platform is a social networking site where users create an individual account to interact with other accounts. The platform originally allowed users to create and upload 15 to 60 second videos. Users then scroll through videos one at a time and can like, comment, share, or use the video to create their own (Miltsov, 2022). For the WRPA, Tik Tok is used to repost content from rodeos and rodeo interviews in short form while interacting with other users through the likes, comments, and sharing options. The video format allows for visuals, sound, and words to all be present. While the platform is mostly video based, Tik Tok also allows users to post their video with a caption and use a variety of sounds. Sounds can include music, voice over, clips from movies/tv, or on-screen voices. Tik Tok also offers filters, which are used to create special effects on screen. All these characteristics of Tik Tok are important to analyze the story of women in rodeo as portrayed on the WRPA page and contribute to how the story is being informed by the experience of the athletes on the page.

It has been noted in prior research that the mechanisms that a social media platform affords to users has an impact on how content is engaged with. A study done on news content suggests that surprising or interesting content can be enticing to audiences and result in higher amounts of likes, comments, shares, or other forms of interaction (Tenenboim, 2022). CTDA considers this principle to be an important part of understanding the relationship between content, audience, and how the two are socially constructed and situated within the broader

culture. Tik Tok's unique platform also includes functions such as favoriting a video, which saves the video to a user's account to look at later. It also includes a duet function where other users can make a new video alongside the original content. Both are another form of user interaction that will be considered alongside likes, comments, and shares.

CTDA also includes technology practice, which is the ways the behaviors associated with using social media inform the messaging of that platform. The behaviors on Tik Tok are the creating and sharing of videos with all the added components. Video production is much more accessible and easier to distribute than it used to be (Delaney, 2016). It is important to understand how women in rodeo are using and creating video to tell their story because the practice facilitates their relationship with outsiders in the form of other users on Tik Tok. The cultural and social part of media creation contributes to the overall understanding of how the WPRA page, and its athletes are contributing to the social media experience and how they are experiencing it themselves. The graphics, sounds, and other characteristics of video production, which create meaning about the story being told as a gendered experience situated in the social values of rodeo.

The social and cultural values that contribute to the creation of content are the final part of CTDA, which considers that these values should be examined to get a holistic understanding of how meaning is created by the social/cultural perspectives. This discourse analysis can lead to emerging themes and patterns, which describe the experience of women in rodeo as portrayed on social media informed by their positionality (Brock, 2016). Women in rodeo have a unique experience that is informed by their historical positionality. This is described in the gender performativity and feminist theories to understand how this experience is created and how it exists in digital spaces when the narrative exemplifies the positionality. Tik Tok and the videos

posted on it by the WPRA provide detailed information about the gendered experience that a discourse analysis can provide an in-depth understanding of how gender and technology are intertwined.

Using the components of the technology interface, the practices, and behaviors of using that technology, and the culturally situated creators of content, an analysis of how women in rodeo are using Tik Tok to tell their story will contribute to gender performativity theory. This study will provide insight into how gender performance on digital platforms is afforded by that platform and the implications it has on the user/content relationship because the representations of women in rodeo in digital spaces reflect the in real life representations.

Table 1. CTDA Components: The form and function of TikTok facilitates the ways in which Women in Rodeo represent themselves in digital spaces and their relationship to outside audiences.

Interface/Technology	Technology Practices	Cultural Ideology (Both interface and practice influence the possible cultural ideologies that emerge from themes within gender performativity and presentation of self as informed by narrative/feminist theories)
Format: 15-60 second videos	Video Production	Understanding of what cowgirls in the rodeo are and what they are supposed to look like
Like, Comment, Share, Favorite, Duet, Buttons	Circulating content by directing the algorithm	Integration of rodeo into the digital space and making the content grounded in positive notions while also being accessible
Sound	Adding to the story using sound sensory	Country music and words that exemplify strong women in rodeo that also appeal to outside audiences
Graphics	Adding artificial symbols to raw visuals	Establishing understanding through symbols that promote rodeo as a professional sport

Text/Captions	Explanation of story intent	Additional explanation and transparency in content
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Table 2: CTDA explanation: How the interconnection of technology, technology practices and cultural ideology relate to the theories and lead to the research question.

Theory	Interface and Discourse Analysis	Method
<p>Gender Performativity Judith Butler</p> <p>States that gender is performed through the lived experience of the individual through linguistics and behavior.</p>	<p>Technology: Tik Tok posts that are posted by the @wprarodeo page and are mediated by the platform to unique audiences.</p>	<p>RQ #1: In what ways does gender performance on TikTok reflect and reinforce the narrative around cowgirl stereotypes?</p> <p>RQ#2: How do the mechanisms of TikTok afford the ability of these narratives to align with the dominant narrative of women in rodeo?</p>
<p>Narrative Theory</p> <p>States that storytelling is a powerful tool that is informed by who is telling the story, how they are telling it and to whom.</p>	<p>Technology Practice: Gender performance through storytelling in video format. Sharing of short video stories on Tik Tok and that are transferable to other platforms.</p>	
<p>Feminist Theory</p> <p>States that experience is subject to the gender and power relationships</p>	<p>Cultural Ideologies: agricultural social hierarchies, value of women in professional sports, highlighting successes of the marginalized female, telling the story of women as characterized by their gender and idealism of that gender under the male dominant narrative</p>	

3.5 Themes and Concepts

For this study based on the literature review, the analysis used a themes and concept guide to find patterns and collect data from the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association Tik Tok. These themes are based on ideas proposed in the first section of the literature review as well

as the above explanation of important Tik Tok mechanisms the platform affords to users.

Common themes for this project are separated into two distinct groups: cowgirl identity and Tik Tok affordances.

The first is themes that deal with identifying characteristics of the cowgirl. This can include the appearance of cowgirls on the WPRA Tik Tok and specific parts of their appearance that are considered a part of the construction of their persona both online and in real life. These characteristics contribute to the gender performance and are individualistic based on the subject's presentation of self in the digital space. The themes include hair, makeup, clothing, and any other physical features that can be seen in a post. Clothing can be broken down to include the types of outfits being worn in different contexts. For example, some clothing falls under what is in the WPRA rulebook for competitors, and some don't. This also includes voice and written captioning. Some posts contain on-camera interviews or voice over of the women athletes in the WPRA. They also are captioned and have distinct language, which directs the tone of the video contributing to the overall narrative. A narrative constructed in the hashtags is also included on most posts.

The second group of themes deals with the affordance of Tik Tok as a platform and the mechanisms, which can be used to interact with content. This includes sound, which can come in several forms. Videos on Tik Tok can contain music as well as use sounds from other creators on the platform. Tik Tok sounds can become popular and circulate across many accounts because they can be used by anyone and often become trends (Anderson, 2020). Sounds can also come in the form of music including current popular songs and artists who the platform has licensing agreements with. The numerical value of likes, comments, shares, favorites, and other Tik Tok functions in relation to the subject of the content was also considered.

Table 3. A list of themes divided into the main two categories of analysis: theoretical and technology practice.

Table of Themes	Gender Performance	Tik Tok Affordance/Technology
Appearance	Clothing, hair, makeup, other physical features	The way physical characteristics are shown video, graphic, other
WPRA Rule Book Appearance	Clothing that fits into the WPRA rulebook for competitors	Clothing being shown in context
Language	What language is being used to describe the experience?	Captions, video graphics, voice over, narration
Sound	Who is talking, who are they talking too	Sound that exists in a post: Tik Tok sound, music, narration, on-screen voice, host
Likes, Comments, Shares, Favorites, Duets	The way users are interacting with content and sharing it	Numerical Values associated with posts

3.6 Data Collection

Data for this study was collected from the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association Tik Tok page and analyzed all posts on the page from the beginning of the page’s creation to present day. The cutoff for posts was January 1st, 2023. The page has 79 videos posted. All of these were analyzed in the study. The page itself has been active since June of 2022 and the most recent post is from September of 2022. By analyzing all the posts on the page, a holistic picture of the ways the organization has used Tik Tok with diverse content. This study will used 4K Tokkit, a video downloading software compatible with computers, to download content for analysis. This ensured that the data pool could not change after download. This also made the videos available offline, so they didn’t have to be analyzed live on Tik Tok.

Due to the nature of CTDA, each post was analyzed individually and important components from each based on the established themes and concepts were taken into consideration. All these important pieces were compiled together to identify patterns that emerged across the posts. Parts of the gender performance were identified and analyzed as a contributor to the overall narrative. The posts were hand-coded into an excel spreadsheet to track common themes. The code sheet outlined each video and separate the components into columns to identify common themes. This thematic analysis allowed for the identification of trends across the WPRA page while analyzing them under the theoretical framework. After this thematic analysis, the technology practices including likes, comments, shares, duets, favorites, and any others were analyzed to understand how users are interacting with these posts. Patterns across the page about interaction were identified. As patterns surfaced, the common themes were analyzed to understand how this technology practice contributes to the cultural context. Both the content themes and the technology interface aided in the analysis of the cultural context and how the relationship between technology and practice create meaning of content.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this study was done using a spreadsheet with rows and column to organize the Tik Tok posts and content. Specifically, the sheet took the posts and cataloged them onto the sheet by taking each aspect of the post and placing it in the appropriate category. Categories varied in content depending on the richness of the post and what kind of content it contained. The pretest was used as a reference point to identify how the data collection system would operate.

3.8 Pretest

Introduction: The pretest for this study was conducted using the @haileykinsel Tik Tok account. Hailey Kinsel, a three-time WPRA world champion barrel racer, is the current reigning world champion for 2022 (ProRodeo.com, 2023). For this pretest, five of Kinsel's Tik Tok posts were analyzed. The five most recent posts, not including pinned posts, were used. All posts were downloaded into the 4K Tok kit and sorted by mechanism or theme into an excel spreadsheet. For the themes, the categories were a video description, appearance, body performance, and language. The language section included language used in the caption or words appearing inside the video itself. The interface (discussed further below) components included: sounds, likes, comments, shares, and favorites in numerical amounts. There was a final column which contained any additional findings not included in the above categories.

Theoretical & Thematic Analysis: The theoretical and thematic analysis, as outlined with the themes of this project, reveals a consistent representation of women in rodeo by Kinsel in her Tik Tok account. In the pretest data, Kinsel's appearance adheres to the expectation of women in professional rodeo. Specifically, four out of the five videos analyzed contained photos or video of Kinsel always in WPRA regulation attire with a western style cuffed/collared shirt, jeans, and a cowboy hat. Kinsel appears to be wearing makeup in all five videos and maintains a consistent appearance. In the one video where Kinsel does not appear in WPRA dress-code, she still wears western style clothing with Aztec prints and a snap-back baseball cap. Language used in posts and surrounding posts was significantly and inherently feminine in a way that showcased Kinsel, her career, and her brand in a positive light. Specifically, in two cases, captions contained descriptions of Kinsel's successes by pointing out her world championship status. Videos which were taken from rodeo performances still contained the announcer's voice in the background who

spoke of Kinsel as a highly rated barrel racer and even pointed out her career earnings, which are over 1.5 million dollars.

Gender performance is consistent with the theoretical framework and consistently displays unique characteristics by a woman in rodeo. All five analyzed posts contained photos



Figure 6: Hailey Kinsel, WPROA Competitor, taken from @haileykinsel Tik Tok, 2023.

and video of Kinsel riding horses, competing in rodeo, or training on horses. This display of athletic sport by Kinsel on her personal account is a significant part of gender performance and shows the ways a barrel racer in professional rodeo is using Tik Tok. In one post, the video was a collage of photos, all which were high-intensity, close-up photos of Kinsel competing on her horse Sister. The content of the pretest does align with the proposed themes and theoretical framework outlined in this project. The gender performance through physical appearance, athletic displays of the body, and consistency with the cowgirl appearance are present.

Interface Analysis: In addition to the thematic analysis in conjunction with the theoretical framework, the pretest data reveals interesting interface characteristics at play. As noted in chapter 3, Tik Tok, as a social media platform, has a distinct interface. The existence of Tik Tok as an app, available on smartphones, represents the way users and creators are constantly creating a relationship with the technology (Bucher, 2019). Therefore, the data collection of this pretest took numerical and linguistic pieces from each Tik Tok post to understand the platform's interface in action.

The data reveals that Kinsel's posts contained a varied number of likes, comments, and shares but all posts consistently had these components present. All five posts in the pretest contained anywhere from 1500-3000 likes. However, the comments were more minimalistic with only between 7 and 17 total on any given post. So, while the interaction on Kinsel's posts is inherently more passive with users liking the post but not always commenting, the circulation of her content is apparent. There are anywhere from 40 to 70 favorites on each post. When a user favorites a post, they are essentially bookmarking the post and saving it to their Tik Tok collections from the feed page (Worb, 2022). This essentially means that users interacting with Kinsels account are saving her content to their own personal collections. This allows them to go back to the post and add it to a collection of other videos they have saved, which may also be organized into different categories.

Sounds are also a distinct part of the Tik Tok platform and facilitate a unique user/creator interaction. Tik Tok sounds are used to create community and explore identity in digital space (Messner, 2022). Therefore, the importance of sound on Tik Tok relates to the ways in which creators are using them to display their content and how audiences are interacting with it. In the pretest data, it is revealed that Kinsel used four original sounds on her posts. This means that the

sound over the video was created by Kinsel and did not previously exist on the platform. That does not mean however, that the sound is entirely original. Kinsel uses popular music on her videos overlaid with sound from her rodeo videos to create a new sound. These sounds were then reused by other Tik Tok creators between 2 and 7 times. This multi-dimensional interaction between Kinsel and an audience viewing her account builds an online relationship that is two-ways and involves additional creative processes. The creation of original sounds by Kinsel builds on to the online performance and adds a layer to Kinsel's personal presentation online.

CTDA Analysis: The @haileykinsel Tik Tok page, represents a recognizable form of how online spaces facilitate social interaction and produce representations of cultural structures. In this pretest, the goal was to operationalize the theoretical framework and identify themes, which would be sufficient to conduct a critical analysis that intertwines the use of the technology and its created meaning. Based on the data collected, there is a concrete representation of gender performance as portrayed by Kinsel on her Tik Tok and the use of the platforms to facilitate interactions. To begin the CTDA analysis, the binding of the three methodological concepts (technology, technology practice and cultural ideology) will connect the underlying relationships of women in rodeo to the larger use of technology to display gender performance as regulated by rodeo culture.

From a critical cultural standpoint, Kinsel's Tik Tok posts contain the ideologies of rodeo culture under the power dynamics of the industry. Kinsel selectively posts videos and photos of herself, which identifies her as a barrel racer and advocate of western lifestyle. This identity exists in the clothes Kinsel is wearing and the language she uses to facilitate the portrayal of herself. Kinsel uses words and phrases that appeal to the positive notions of her cowgirl identity. This includes the wording around her successes as a world champion and position within the

larger rodeo community as such. The purpose of this language is to portray herself and build her brand as a successful woman in barrel racing. However, this language is limited in the sense that it adheres to the understanding that Kinsel is limited in her successes solely to the event of barrel racing. This event represents a small segment of the larger rodeo community and is a historically marginalized sport because it is denoted and understood as a strictly women's sport. This implication is culturally significant because it places women in an inferior position simply because of their competitive limitations in the sport of rodeo and furthers less representation of women in rodeo culture. The gender rules in rodeo are very culturally defined by the woman as being a part of rodeo that only has a few known and acceptable positions. While one of these is barrel racing, which is a highly sought after sport for women in rodeo, it comes with additional rules about how a cowgirl can be. Barrel racers are expected to and based on the pretest data, do adhere to the expectations of professional rodeo culture. Physical appearance is an important cultural aspect of rodeo culture and Kinsel participates in it by, even online, displaying herself in specific western clothing repeatedly. This conveys the value of women in professional rodeo as having to exist both in real life and online in very distinct ways to uphold social expectations.

The relationship between the technology and technology practice for this pretest are rooted in the ways Kinsel uses Tik Tok's capabilities to display herself online while other users are interacting with that content. While this project does not infer the meaning created by users, there are still identifiable relationships at play. The interface analysis revealed that Kinsels creation of original Tik Tok sounds using popular music combined with natural sounds of rodeo video, resulted in other users using those sounds to create their own content. The most notable instances were ones where other users used these original sounds by Kinsel to create their own videos containing horses, rodeo, or other western culture characteristics. This is significant

because users are creating meaning out of Kinsels posts, which describe a desired experience. Kinsel, as a highly respected barrel racer, serves as the ideal version of the cowgirl, which others may aspire to. Furthermore, Kinsels existence on social media is culturally significant because professional rodeo is new to online platforms relative to other sports and industries. Kinsel is, in a way, setting the expectations for how women in rodeo should and will appear on social media platforms. The story being told by Kinsel is how a cowgirl, representing professional rodeo, is supposed to look, act, and portray herself in digital spaces. This act is one that directly mirrors the expectations of Kinsel in the sport of rodeo and beyond. For people in professional rodeo (contestants, staff, contract personnel, etc.) Kinsel is held to a certain standard regardless of her words and actions during participation in rodeo or in her personal life. Kinsel is using her social media to tell her rodeo story, with some hints of outside content, but mainly the parts which present her as the cowgirl she is expected to be. These relationships have a direct impact on how the cowgirl identity exists on social media as it is culturally informed and in practice, creates intricate facilitation of that identity on Tik Tok.

Conclusions: The goal of this pretest was to operationalize the themes presented in the literature review and apply the theoretical framework to the CTDA method. Based on the above results, the pretest was successful in identifying themes and relating them to gender performance. The pretest used the Tik Tok page @haileykinsel to understand how a cowgirl in the WPRA is currently using Tik Tok to portray her story and the technological relationship building, which results in the creation of meaning about that experience from a cultural perspective. The limitations of this pretest were that the Tik Tok page is a single person creating content for her personal brand while the @wprarodeo page is a larger entity, which will showcase more than one cowgirl. However, with the data pool being more expansive, the themes and concepts should be

more apparent and provide more in-depth analysis. The outcomes of this pretest were positive and verified the use of CTDA to answer the research questions.

3.9 Data Collection and Codebook Creation

The method of gathering data for this study was to take all videos from the @wprarodeo Tik Tok and hand code them into a spreadsheet to organize content by theme. The following steps were used to analyze the posts using Critical Techno-Cultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA). To maintain the data and access to the content in non-live form, the videos from the page were downloaded onto a computer using the 4K Tok Kit, a free software which downloads Tik Tok posts to a device. Following the download, the 79 Tik Tok posts were analyzed from most recent to least recent as they appear on the account. The posts span from June 14th, 2022, thru September 1st, 2022. The proposed cutoff for posts of analysis was January 1st but there were no new posts following September 1st of 2022. Each post was then individually analyzed and sorted into the spreadsheet.

3.10 Codes

For the spreadsheet, there are 12 categories (columns), which each posts' data was sorted into. The first was an initial description of the video to easily identify each video. The following was a physical description of subjects in the video. The CTDA analysis takes special consideration of physical appearance and its cultural implications. The next was a description of any content surrounding body performance as it relates to gender performance. The next two sections dealt with language in multiple forms including captions, hashtags, and in-video voices. Then the next column was used to log the sounds used in each post and a small description of the sound. The following 5 columns were used to collect numerical data on each post, which included the number of: sound reuses, likes, comments, favorites, and shares. The final column

was an extra space for interesting comments or observations on a particular video. A screenshot of the sheet below shows the first 5 videos and the data collected on each to demonstrate the organizational process and overall data collection procedure.

Video Number (Most Recent First)	Video Description	Appearance: Clothing, hair, makeup, etc.	Body Performance	Language - Captions/In-Video Words	Hashtags	Sound	Sounds Uses	Likes	Comments	Favorites	Shares	Other Significant Findings/Comments
1	Bayleigh Choate, walking through trailers at rodeo, running barrels in competition	Red blingy button down, tan straw hat, jeans, black jacket	Running of barrels, feminine riding seat	"Bayleigh, 19, looks to make her first NFR, win Rookie of the Year, Make her first Canadian Finals	#barrel racing #prorodeo #wprorodeo #barrelracer #rodeo #typ	Original Sound: contains Swang by Rae Sremmurd	24	4630	10	123	9	Tik Tok notes if people you follow are tagged in a video, 24 sound uses
2	Shows Stevi Hamill with Famous Lemon Drops, a tribute to the horses passing	Black felt hat, long hair, large dangly earrings, blue/purple patterned button down shirt	Standing by horse, affectionate patting, barrel racing	"It has taken me a few days to gain my composure to share the terrible news...Thank you to everyone who made her what she was. Her legacy will live on in her offspring. All my love to you sweet lemon drop" #barrelracing	#barrelracing	Original Sound: contains I won't give up by Jason Mraz	4	9656	239	258	354	Shows value of animals in pro rodeo, shows cowgirls as sympathetic but strong
3	Michelle Alley & Saucy winning Kitsap Stampede	turquoise button down, tan straw hat, long blonde hair	Barrel racing, high intensity, closeup	"Michelle & Saucy are your champions of the kitsap stampede #barrelracing #prorodeo #cowgirl #wprorodeo	#barrel racing #prorodeo #wprorodeo #barrelracer #rodeo #typ	Original Sound: Contains I Kissed a Girl, Get Low When the Whistle Blow	370	683	2	45	8	Shows Michelle praising horse at the end of run
4	Hailey Kinsel & Sister running barrels, Kinsel doing interview, closeup of her face	Black felt hat, pink shaded button ups with sponsors on them, wild rags, back numbers	Smiling, barrel racing, flying	"Hailey Kinsel & sister are at it again winning \$3,000 at Bremerton & 7,000 at Kennebec makes her the Female Athlete of the Week "	#barrel racing #prorodeo #wprorodeo #barrelracer #cowgirl #haileykinsel #typ	Original Sound: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Her." Song lyrics: whos better than your favorite bad bitch, turn the whole world into a savage	43	8565	19	398	42	Interesting song to be posting with Hailey
5	Amanda Welsh and Firefly barrel run at horse heaven round up I'm 2021	Black Felt Hat, brown lined yellow button up,	Barrel racing, intensity, kicking athleticism	"Amanda Welsh and Firefly running a 17.39 at horse heaven round up I'm 2021	#barrel racing #prorodeo #wprorodeo #barrelracer #rodeo #typ #flashbacktriday #cowgirl	Original Sound: Contains Bad for Me by Megan and Liz	2	352	1	9	0	Contains a location marker at Kennebec

Figure 7: A screenshot of the data collected using a spreadsheet format with the 12 categories of post sorting.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The results and analysis section of the study provide in-depth understanding of how women in rodeo are currently using Tik Tok and in what ways gender performance contributes to the overall narrative. This analysis provided an understanding into how the affordances of Tik Tok provide women in rodeo the ability to reconstruct and reinforce the dominant stereotypes associated with the cowgirl identity. Using CTDA to understand how technology, technology practice, and cultural ideology work together, this project contributes to the understanding of how these three build relationships between creators, technology, and create content meaning. The results of this study analyze how the interface of Tik Tok, and its unique design features allow for interaction with content and build relationships between cultural ideology and their manifestation in digital spaces. The gendered experience and the presentation of that experience are intertwined with the technology and how Tik Tok can allow these presentations to exist in online spaces. Based on the historically situated characteristics of the cowgirl identity, an analysis of how this positionality is portrayed and enforced through Tik Tok is explored. The results of this study inform both research and industry on how historically and culturally marginalized identities are and can use social networking platforms to tell their unique stories to diverse audiences.

This section begins with an interface analysis of Tik Tok and takes note of the relationship between content and the platform. The final section uses CTDA analysis to bridge the relationship between themes, the Tik Tok interface, and the identified cultural ideologies, which create a greater meaning for the content.

For this analysis, Butler's theory of gender performance is used to identify and define characteristics of gender performed by women in rodeo on the @wprarodeo Tik Tok. This account, which features women who are current contestant card holders in the WPRA, is host to the narratives about the cowgirl identity as they interact within grander rodeo culture and social media. The entire @wprarodeo Tik Tok was analyzed, which included 79 original posts by the account, and sorted into an excel spreadsheet by theme and interface components. All posts were downloaded into the 4K Tok kit and each component was recorded while specifically noting instances of thematic corporation and theoretical components. For the themes, the categories were a video description, appearance, body performance, language (captions or other in-video words), hashtags, and sounds. The interface (discussed further below) components included: sounds (number of uses of the sound by other users), likes, comments, shares, and favorites in numerical amounts. There was a final column, which contained any additional findings not included in the above categories on any individual post.

Based on the data collected and the theoretical framework, several themes consistently appear across the @wprarodeo Tik Tok. Several gendered characteristics as well as concepts from the thematic table appear consistent with the proposed and expected identifying cowgirl identity. Several examples of themes that were present in the data, connected to the theoretical framework will be explored. The themes presented in the methods section were developed based on the literature to encompass parts of the gender performance and building a strong argument for a distinctive performance as constructed by the complex historical/cultural relationships in rodeo and the larger agriculture industry.

The overarching themes and patterns of the @wprarodeo Tik Tok are that the majority of the posts (all but the exception of two) feature photos and videos of current WPRA contestants

barrel racing in an official competition setting. The entire page is made up of original posts, which showcase solely barrel racing and highlight certain athletes more often than others. Breakaway roping (the only other WPRA sanctioned event) was not shown on the page. The WPRA has nearly 3,000 card-holding members but their Tik Tok account contained just under 40 individual cowgirls across the 79 posts who were all barrel racing (wpra.com, 2023). Therefore, from a thematic standpoint, the patterns appear stronger as the same cowgirls are showcased multiple times throughout their rodeo competitions and there are distinct representations, which overlap with one another between posts. This also suggests a reinforcement of barrel racing as the quintessential sport for women in rodeo and portrays the sport as a singularly admirable profession for women in agriculture.

4.2 Interface Analysis

This section is an interface analysis of Tik Tok in relation to the overall content and concepts used in this paper. There is a correlation between the ways technology is used to build content and create meaning. The value of this meaning has implications on the ways viewers are interacting with content and the values associated with the subject matter. Specifically, for Tik Tok, the platform offers unique video creation options as well as user interactivity through sounds and other mechanisms. There are also multi-dimensional elements of language, which were considered for this analysis. This section details ways the WPRA account is using the affordances of Tik Tok to enable a concrete representation of women in rodeo, which appeals to the social and cultural values of professional rodeo. There is a significant use of original sounds on the account and furthermore, use of those original sounds by other accounts who have interacted with the WPRA account. Women in rodeo on the WPRA are represented in distinct ways which align with the dominant narrative of women in the sport and women in sports more

broadly. This study found no significant correlation between the number of likes, comments, shares, or favorites in relation to content. All numerical values were inconsistent and overall low across the posts.

The Use of Video for Body Performance

The WPRA uses the affordances of Tik Tok to dramatize and enhance the cowgirls’ athletic performance using the affordances of Tik Tok. As a unique and new platform for hosting video content, Tik Tok offers a digital space where multiple technological components contribute to the creation of content and the receiving of that content. As an athletic performance, the cowgirl body is displayed in a particular way that is consistent on the page. In



Figure 8: A still image taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok of Stevi Hillman, 2022

the analyzed Tik Tok posts, there are several instances where video editing tactics and effects are used to add an intensity to the barrel racing performance, which is a different, more expansive experience than when barrel racing is seen in real life. These video enhancements tell a dramatized version of the cowgirl experience, which enforces the stereotypes of cowgirls in a male-dominant sport.

These depictions include the use of video jump cuts to add a creative aspect to the video experience. Some of the posts use video jump cuts to align with music and create a theatrical effect to the viewer. Jump cuts add intensity and creative appeal to the video. Additionally, posts which solely feature photos or feature photos and videos, use interesting video transitions, which can be edited into the post on Tik Tok. These transitions contribute to the overall effectiveness of the video in portraying athleticism as an intensely physical part of sports. The audience's experience of the sport is enhanced through tactful video editing because they can see, hear, and perceive the sport in a closer way than if they were attending the sport in real life. Therefore, there is a more intimate relationship between audience perception of the gender performance in digital spaces. This intimacy exists in the exposure of cowgirl's bodies to the audience using multiple camera angles and up-close videography. In this online portrayal of barrel racing, there is emotion invoked using video editing and music. In-line with narrative theory, this emotional additive increases the audience experience with the content and makes the content more impactful. With the length of these videos being relatively short, there is a small amount of content being used to portray the full story. This makes each small part more significant because for the audience, it represents the larger picture and the perception of the full story.

Tik Tok uses a short video format, which only allows for a selective amount of content to be posted on the page. While most professional barrel racers runs are considerably short,

(between 13 and 19 seconds on average) Tik Tok's short video format does not always allow for the complete picture. Therefore, there is a certain amount of missing information and audiences must rely only on what is shown. This content has been selectively taken from larger videos to post on Tik Tok. Most of the videos on the WPRA page appear to be taken from a full recording of a rodeo or a broadcasted version of the rodeo. These two-hour performances are scaled down to only take a few seconds from the whole story.

Tik Tok also allows for photo collage depictions. This involves the creation of a video using only a series of photos, which are transitioned between in unique ways. Several posts on the WPRA Tik Tok use photo series as posts. One post depicts barrel racer Margo Crowther during a barrel run and the entire post is simply a static photo with no other graphic content. While this is a less dynamic post and contains no moving picture, it is still a way the WPRA can depict barrel racers using Tik Tok's platform. This depiction is multidimensional by using video and photo, which allows for more audience interaction with different content.

Language and Narrative on Rodeo Tik Tok

Another critical affordance, which contributes to the use of Tik Tok as a technology is language. Language appears in multiple forms on Tik Tok. This can include the captions on individual posts (which can contain hashtags and appear at the bottom of the video), sounds which contain words (including music, voice over or narration) and in-video captions. While

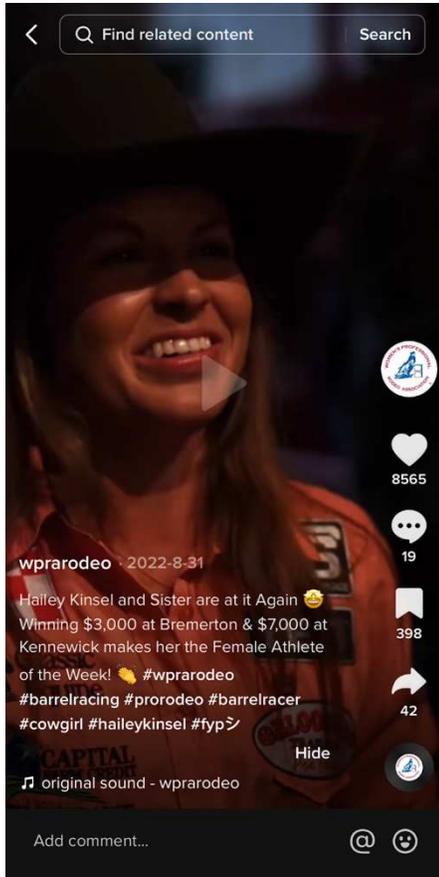


Figure 10: Screenshot from @wprarodeo to show caption interface, 2022.



Figure 9: A screenshot of @wprarodeo Tik Tok showing consistent hashtags. 2022.

comments can also be posted to any post by other accounts, that aspect was not considered a part of the way WPRR contributes to the narrative around the cowgirl identity and will not be analyzed.

Captions are a concrete way in which the WPRR communicates with its audience using selective language to describe the cowgirls in posts and other content. Consistently the language used in captions on the WPRR Tik Tok describes cowgirls in positive light and on numerous occasions, highlights successes. The captions are located at the bottom of the Tik Tok when viewed on a smartphone device and are easily accessible to the eyes when scrolling through videos. Captions are also expandable. This means that while only partial captions may be visible

at first, a user may click on the caption area to expand it completely to reveal more words and potentially hashtags.

Hashtags are also used on Tik Tok to build larger content archives using similar language. A hashtag uses a term or phrase preceded by the pound symbol, which is then turned into a link, which can be clicked on. This link is attached to any video, which uses that same hashtag. This feature allows for users to click on a hashtag and be taken to even more content with similar subject material and likely similar groups of people who post that content. A few specific hashtags were consistently used on the WPRA Tik Tok page. These hashtags included: #barrelracing #prorodeo #wprarodeo #barrelracer #rodeo #fyp #cowgirl. These hashtags (or some combination of them) exist in some form on all videos except one on the page. This builds a database of the WPRA videos under each of these hashtags where users can seek out similar content by clicking on the hashtag or searching for it in the search bar. The use of hashtags can build a larger audience base for the WPRA account by linking their content to phrases and words associated with their account. Specifically, the use of #cowgirl and #prorodeo both separates and joins the cowgirl identity to the male-dominated sport of rodeo. This is because the #cowgirl will be used primarily on videos, which showcase a woman dominated event in rodeo while #prorodeo encompasses all events in professional rodeo, which are primarily men's events. This conflict separates the cowgirl identity to be its own while also reinforcing cowgirls as a part of the male dominant rodeo.

Collectively, hashtags and captions are an additive to the video by guiding the viewers understanding of the content and overall message. While the video may be showing barrel racing, the caption is guiding the reader on what to think about in relation to the video. In the case of the WPRA Tik Tok, the caption guides audiences to barrel racing as a high-intensity

sport that is admirable by the women who compete in it. Captions and hashtags are reinforcing the narrative that barrel racing done by the cowgirls of the WPRA is a sport for strong women who are to be commended for their success in the arena by not only the WPRA itself but people viewing the content as well. Language as an additional layer to the visual video is telling audiences how and what to think about the content they are viewing.

The narrative which is present with language on Tik Tok aligns with the dominant stereotypes of women in professional rodeo. They are both successful and powerful athletes but are also subject to the limitations of their positionality. They exist separate from cowboys in that they are described through captions and hashtags as inherently feminine and function as their own identity. This both contributes to the overall narrative of rodeo as a gendered experience but also pushes against the dominant rodeo because it highlights the successes of women athletes and portrays their story uniquely from their perspective. Tik Tok affords the ability of these narratives by allowing the WPRA to use both visuals and language to construct the story of women in professional rodeo in a more complex way than only one or the other. This multidimensional form of social media content exemplifies the gender performance by showing body performance in up-close ways and facilitating that performance with affirming language and consistent words in hashtags.

Through the Cowgirl Eyes: A Feminist Approach

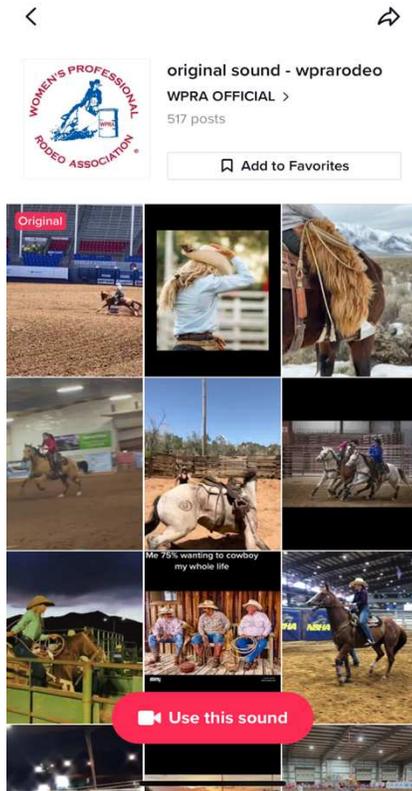


Figure 12: A screenshot of the @wprarodeo Tik Tok sound interface, 2022.

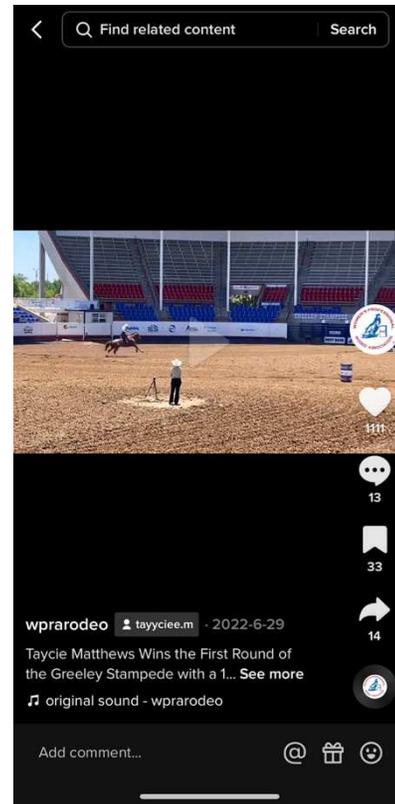


Figure 11: A screenshot of the @wprarodeo Tik Tok to show interface with original sound bar at the bottom below the caption.

Sound on Tik Tok is used to add texture to posts and give the post more implied contexts. These additives can be in the form of music, narrative sounds, in-video sound, and on-camera spoken sound. Sounds are a distinctive characteristic of Tik Tok, which add to the overall user experience and interaction. Any sound posted on Tik Tok is either an original sound, which is created by the account, or a sound used by an account taken from another. While Tik Tok calls these sounds original, it is important to note not all the content in an original sound is owned or created by the account who posted it. For example, the use of music is allowed in an original sound but may come from Tik Tok’s music database to create a unique original sound to overlay on a video. When a sound is clicked on at the bottom of the Tik Tok interface, the user is taken to a collection of videos which use that sound. All but a single video on the WPRA page used an

original sound and most videos had anywhere between 0 and 570 re-uses of the WPRA's original sounds. Many of the videos across all the sounds which were reused contained similar content and aligned with the original content.

Overall, the use of sound and the ability to add more in-depth information using sounds in Tik Tok is an important distinction for the platform and the relationship it builds between creator and audience. Sounds at depth to the meaning of the content and is an additive, which builds onto the cowgirl experience by allowing for direct interaction between the cowgirl and audience. Sound on top of video and the use of those sounds to build larger content groups affords the ability of the WPRA to enhance the story as told by women in rodeo. This story is informed by the cowgirl experience, which is inherently gendered by their positionality and how they choose to represent themselves and how the WPRA chooses to portray their story on the page.

Admiration or Reservation: Content Warnings on Tik Tok

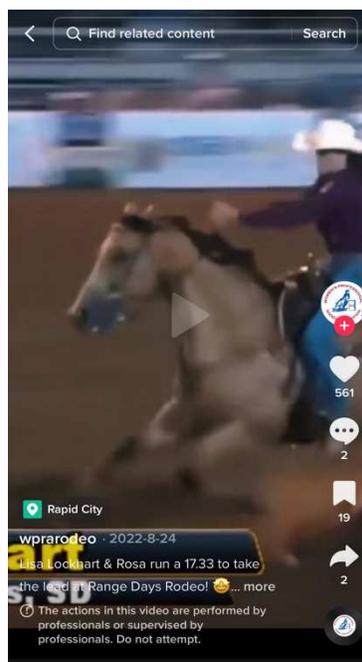


Figure 13: Screenshot of WPRA Tik Tok, 2023 with the disclaimer displayed beneath the caption.

In addition to Tik Tok's complex interface as described above, the platform also utilizes content warnings and other disclaimers that are present on the WPRA page. The specific disclaimer used on the WPRA page is one that appears below the caption and reads, "The actions in this video are performed by professionals or supervised by professionals. Do not attempt" (@wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2023). Around 40% of the videos on the WPRA page have this content warning on the bottom. While one source claims Tik Tok has implemented such safety banners to potentially keep their platform safe from a legal perspective by informing users of content that is considered 'dangerous' based on Tik Tok's community guidelines, research and other informants on the matter are limited (Aw, 2021). While some Tik Tok content can be flagged and given a disclaimer if another user reports it, the way disclaimers appear on some videos and not all, is not fully understood. However, there are still important implications for these disclaimers in their contribution to an audience understanding of content.

The 'professionals' content warning on the WPRA Tik Tok is an interface component that contributes to the overall narrative of the WPRA Tik Tok. This warning sign could have several implications on the sport of rodeo and barrel racing from the audience perspective. The warning can both validate professional rodeo as a real and credible sport but could also be understood as risky to people in the video. There is also a level of admiration that comes when audiences view content, which is perceived to be risky but is being controlled in a professional space. This important distinction between professional space and non-professional space enforces the idea of barrel racing as a valid sport-form. With Tik Tok only offering short-story format, additional information being presented through these disclaimers is adding to the bigger story in the eyes of the audience.

This indicator to the audience of barrel racing as valid or professional contributes to the overall narrative about women in sports and adds to the gender performance. The content warning acts as a credibility provider for women competing in a physically demanding sport. This body performance in barrel racing and the validation of that performance as potentially risky, builds on the portrayal of cowgirls as both physically and mentally tough. This daring characteristic of the cowgirl is a part of the gender performance that is being commended through the narrative in the video and captions. This narrative perpetuates the notion that cowgirls, as professional athletes, are to be taken seriously and are to be admired for their performance of physically demanding work while also appearing as traditional representations of beauty in western culture.

4.3 CTDA Analysis

Using the above interface analysis combined with the thematic themes backed by gender performativity theory, the final step is a critical cultural analysis of the findings. This CTDA analysis discusses the cultural implications of the content as well as fits it into the technology and practice of that technology. These three components combined create a well-defined discussion about how women in professional rodeo are using Tik Tok to reinforce and afford the dominant narratives of women in rodeo. This narrative is subject to both the historical and cultural positionality of the cowgirl identity while also being constructed through the technological affordances of social media. The CTDA analysis, using its three methodological concepts (technology, technology practice and cultural ideology) will connect the relationship between the WPRA Tik Tok and the use of technology to display gender performance as regulated by rodeo culture.

4.4 Discourse and Cultural Ideologies

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis combines the above analytic discussion with the identification of cultural ideologies that exist within the larger narrative. These main themes which surfaced under the CTDA analysis of the WPRA Tik Tok are physical appearance, athletic performance, and women empowerment through collective identity. These three cultural ideologies encompass the ways in which the WPRA Tik Tok uses the social media platform to exhibit the values of women in professional rodeo while also creating a distinct narrative, which guides the story being portrayed in digital spaces.

4.4.1 The Cowgirl Appearance: Hair, Makeup, & Clothing

The themes which were originally proposed in this project were found to be represented on the @wprarodeo account. In terms of hair, makeup, and clothing, attention was focused on the appearance of women in this account to pinpoint the adherence to WPRA rules about clothing as well as social expectations of physical appearance. Consistently across the videos of the account, long hair, that is neatly groomed and visible, was a defining part of the cowgirl look. In sanctioned barrel racing events, although there is not a written rule directly referencing hair, all cowgirls in the Tik Tok posts had select hairstyles and types. This includes running barrels with their hair completely down under their hat and having it tied in a ponytail or braid. While curly hair is an option and sometimes something cowgirls do, barrel racers commonly run with straight hair. Across the posts, most girls' hair was straight unless braided. From a cultural standpoint, there is an unspoken distinction between barrel racers and other women in rodeo, including rodeo queens, based on the way hair is worn. Barrel racers wear their hair long and straight while rodeo queens wear their hair curly with big wings. The only curl a barrel racer might use is a loose wave or natural wave. There is perhaps a correlation between hair being worn straight and

the nature of barrel racing because curly hair is difficult to maintain at high speed and takes longer to style. Even within rodeo culture, there are different expectations of hair between different groups of women. While these hair distinctions aren't explicitly written in the WPRA rules or Miss Rodeo America rules, it is a social expectation, which women in rodeo, particularly barrel racers, adhere to. There was only one instance where a video showcased a cowgirl with a hair color which wasn't blonde, brunette, or black (neutral tones). Many of the subjects in the videos had long blonde or brunette hair. It is important to note this common theme as an identifier of the social expectations of cowgirls, which contributes to the performance of gender.



Figure 14: Barrel racer Steely Steiner, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.



Figure 15: Barrel racer Bayleigh Choate, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

As shown in the literature review regarding western idealism of women in the industry, long hair, even with the use of extensions, is highly valued to enhance the feminine appearance.

The two WPRA barrel racers pictured, Steely Steiner (left) and Bayleigh Choate (right) are consistently shown riding with their hair long and fully down. This performance of gender is important to note because barrel racers, who compete in a high speed and intense sport, still must adhere to the social expectations of appropriate hair even during competition, not just before or after. The only outlier with the theme of long, flowing, neutral colored hair was one post featuring Leslie Smalygo, WPRA barrel racer. In two posts Smalygo's barrel runs are shown. In

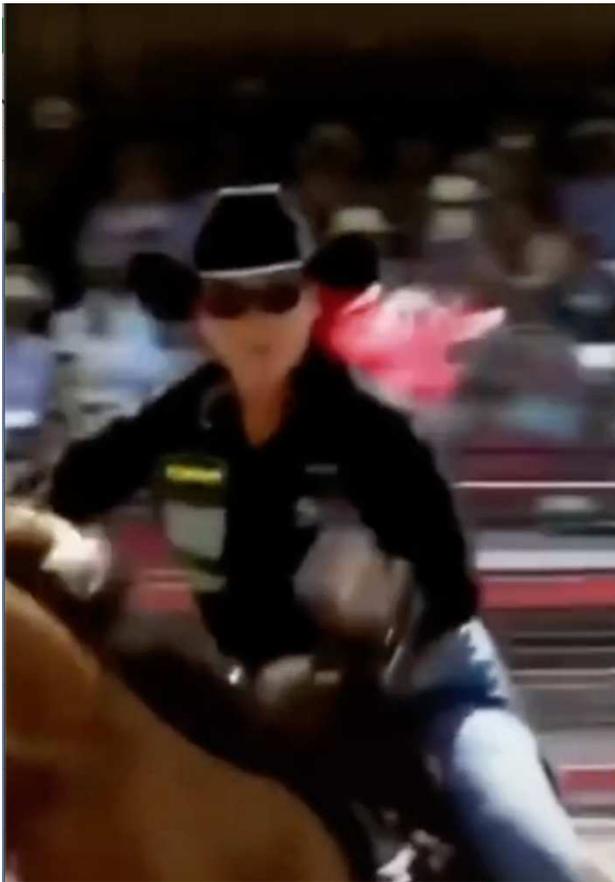


Figure 17: Leslie Smalygo with pink hair, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022



Figure 16: Leslie Smalygo with blonde hair, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022

the first (left) she is shown following a similar pattern of other cowgirls on the page with long blonde hair but in the second (right) is seen with long, pink colored hair. This was the only significant outlier. It is important to note the use of hair dyes to enhance appearances as a part of

the culture. More specifically, pink has a significance when talking about gender and gender norms. Pink is known for being a feminine color and is used to appeal to feminine characteristics. Although there is not commonality in using non-neutral colored hair dyes, Smaylgo is presenting an enhanced feminine characteristic by using pink.

While the exact intent or duration of the pink hair is unknown, the presence of it on the WPRA Tik Tok speaks to the ways women are not expected to, but actively adhere to social expectations of gender regardless of intent. However, there is also a significance of pink more broadly in rodeo. The Tough Enough to Wear Pink (TETWP) campaign was created in 2004 by members of the rodeo community as a way for rodeos and western events to be involved in supporting breast cancer awareness (Tough Enough to Wear Pink, 2022). This partnership involves rodeos using the TETWP theme to encourage donations usually during a rodeo performance for a specific person or breast cancer organization. The symbolism of pink in rodeo is often associated with TETWP but not traditionally portrayed as a hair color. Most rodeos who participate in TETWP involve rodeo staff by wearing pink shirts and rodeo contestants usually do the same as far as physical appearance is concerned. Pink is an acceptable color in the rodeo community, even for men, it is uncommon to see dyed pink hair. While Smalygo's intention is unknown from the data, there is a symbolic representation of femininity to outsiders but to insiders there may be a connection to TETWP. The post itself featuring the pink hair does not appear to have any significant interaction by likes, comments, or shares.

There is a significance in the display of hair and makeup on the @wprarodeo Tik Tok in that all 79 posts and the cowgirls in them, adhere to the social expectations of enhanced femininity by consistently displaying cowgirls with long hair, which was consistently visible and with only one exception, was a shade of blonde, brunette, or black color. While makeup isn't



Figure 18: Closeups of cowgirls taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

always visible in every post (the subject's face is not clearly shown up close), the posts with closeups show a visible use of cosmetics to some degree including foundations, eye makeup, eyelashes, and others. Several posts in the @wprarodeo Tik Tok seemed to focus particularly on the cowgirls face and getting up-close. This intimate showcase of the cowgirls faces and features is an important indicator of the ways the WPRA is branding themselves and their athletes as it relates to physical appearance. However, this branding is not concretely written and is instead maintained by social expectations. Based on the consistency in the data, there is a distinct look barrel racers are expected to have. The makeup showcased in posts on these barrel racers has a uniformity from girl to girl. They are wearing makeup, but it is worn in specific ways. Their makeup is conservative in the sense that it enhances beauty but does not create it. There is a distinction between true rodeo athletes (in this case, barrel racers) and other women in rodeo. This 'real cowgirl' look uses makeup to enhance beauty and facial characteristics to make them more feminine but is reasonable in the sense that it is appropriate for the sport. The real cowgirl look is used by barrel racers to distinguish themselves as inherently beautiful and maintains that

these athletes value their appearance while also suggesting that there is a realness to them. The realness comes from the barrel racers need to separate themselves as serious rodeo athletes who are separate from other groups of women in rodeo.

The above cowgirls are an example of the use of limited framing in a video to highlight the face and selectively display the cultural values of cowgirls, which maintain that physical appearance and beauty are important. Barrel racing as a high intensity sport still requires its participants to appear polished and pretty during competition to adhere to social expectations, which are then shown consistently throughout the WPRA Tik Tok.

Clothing in professional rodeo is another important cultural consideration and carries many social implications and expectations. As described in the literature review, women in professional rodeo must adhere to clothing guidelines during competition that are outlined in the WPRA Rulebook. This includes a minimal description, which describes the required attire for competition. While these guidelines are somewhat vague and leave a lot of room for variance, the WPRA Tik Tok account had several consistencies with the clothing the cowgirls on the page were wearing. While the WPRA clothing requirements are only enforced during the cowgirl's actual barrel run at the rodeo, all posts on the account showed cowgirls in full 'uniform', which is significant since there were no outliers across the 79 videos. There are also notable repeats in clothing and appearance. In three separate posts, which contained videos of barrel racer Bayleigh Choate competing at three different rodeos, she was wearing the same sparkly red shirt. This is a notable recurrence of gender performance through clothing. Additionally, these separate instances were posted by the WPRA on the page multiple times. As barrel racers in the WPRA become successful and appear at more rodeos with higher payout, they also become known for staple characteristics they consistently use in competition. This includes clothing and other

physical appearance characteristics. For Choate, the red sparkly shirt is a staple being used to distinguish herself from other barrel racers. Not only does it allow her to be recognizable to fans, but to others within the rodeo as well. Commonly, rodeo announcers will use these staple characteristics to introduce or identify barrel racers to fans when it is their turn to compete. This specific persona Choate is putting together using consistency in her appearance identifies her as a woman, as a serious competitor, and as herself. Using the guidelines of the WPRA rules on clothing, there is still the ability for barrel racers to distinguish themselves through gendered characteristics.



Figure 19: Barrel racer Bayleigh Choate in red bling shirt, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

The above themes as they relate to the performance of gender are positive indicators of a consistent branding of the cowgirl identity, which has distinctive rules that are repeated on the WPRA Tik Tok page. Most notably, cowgirls as professional athletes are expected to and shown to put high value on their appearance including full hair and makeup even during a physically



Figure 20: Barrel racer Shali Lord with sponsor logos on shirt, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

demanding and intense competition. There is also a consistency in the appearance of sponsor logos on the cowgirls clothing. While not present in all videos, it is a notable consistency with clothing. The use of sponsorship logos on shirts is an example of how women in professional rodeo and athletes are not only in compliance with the social expectations of rodeo but with that of their supporting brands. Representing sponsors as an athlete is another layer of expectations because this extension of identity requires the individual to appeal to more than one set of social expectations. While the rules may be similar between a sponsoring brand and rodeo, the athlete must balance their own reputation with that of their sponsors. Most individual athletes are

sponsored by a specific western clothing brand such as Wrangler, Cinch, Roper, Justin, or other popular western clothing seller. Additionally, many will have a horse feed sponsor such as Purina, Platinum Performance, or Nutrena. Other sponsors may include local businesses from the athlete's hometown or people in the industry they know and have a good relationship with.

The display of WPRA barrel racers in particular clothing on their Tik Tok is a contributor to the cultural ideology of physical appearance. These expectations have grown out of the history of western clothing as having individuality in certain aspects such as color, fit, or style, while also maintaining the collective identity of western wear and rodeo. Clothing appears very consistent and athletes on the WPRA page are shown only in rulebook appropriate outfits even when not actively competing. The practice of using Tik Tok to show a very particular representation of WPRA cowgirls in relation to appearance is a notable use of the ways Tik Tok facilitates the display of properties of the cowgirl identity to audiences.

In relation to the gender performance, there are significant perpetuations of gender that are governed by the heteronormative power structure in relation to clothing, makeup, hair, and overall presentation. The ideal woman is facilitated by what is appropriate and desirable under the eyes of the dominant narrative in rodeo culture and the US more broadly. Women in the US have historically been the primary caretakers and have to balance family concerns with their own career (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). As Butler suggests, this idealization of motherhood is an representation of the ways the power of men dictate social expectations of women and how they have continued to even now (Butler, 2011). This dominant dictation of how women should be is integrated into current social expectations of them across different career paths including rodeo. Since these are historically desirable traits of women in the west, they have carried over into expectations of current women in rodeo through the culture.

The gender performance on the WPRA Tik Tok as a construction of the dominant perspective, reflects the idea that women are required to look a certain way to be desirable, even in a sporting arena. The values set by the dominant power in rodeo culture, white men, heavily influence the ways women in rodeo must fit themselves into the culture by adhering to these expectations, which are to be objectively beautiful and therefore desirable. This sexualization of women in rodeo for the male gaze is a part of the gender experience that is portrayed through Tik Tok and a narrative that is afforded to all kinds of audiences. Social media is a platform where potentially sexualized representations of cowgirls are highly subject to the male gaze and thus further reinforced as the ideal for women in dominant US culture, which is centered in whiteness, in the acceptance (or even expectation) of beauty enhancement through cosmetics, and in women as objects of desire.

4.4.2 Body Performances of Gender

The @wprarodeo Tik Tok page contains video content of professional barrel racers who demonstrate the physicality of the sport of rodeo and more specifically, the performance of the cowgirl body. As described in the literature review, cowgirls are the professionals in rodeo who are expected to be equally beautiful and athletic. This assumption of the woman's body as a vessel for high level performance and high intensity physicality is a value of the culture of professional rodeo. This value directly conflicts itself because beauty and grace are not easily maintained in the sport of rodeo. The sport is physically dirty and requires a high level of physical ability in all events. Women in rodeo are culturally expected to be physically stronger and mentally tougher than the average woman. In the agriculture industry, women are thought of as being tough and expected to be so. While the definition of tough is not explicitly defined anywhere, socially speaking, members of the community understand women of agriculture to be

more resilient and women who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty by getting the job done. For example, a woman in rodeo would be expected to be able to drive a large truck and trailer, throw heavy bales of hay, and participate in physically demanding farm/ranch work. This directly contrasts historical representations and views of women outside the agriculture industry who are not meant to be doing physically demanding or physically 'dirty' work. Rather, women are supposed to be less physically capable and handle work that is within their social realm including being caretakers, objects of affection, and doing jobs which allow them to maintain physical femininity and perfection. Specifically, barrel racers must be able to handle the laborious and dirty parts of raising horses and other livestock by themselves. These are social expectations of how the cowgirl body ought to appear but also how she needs to be able to use it. Moreover, these exceptions are also combined with the expectations that cowgirls are still beautiful and affectionate.

On the WPRA Tik Tok there are repetitive displays of athleticism that are particular to barrel racing as well as cowgirls. There appears to be a specific way woman in rodeo portray physicality in their sport on a habitual level. Barrel racing as it is depicted on the WPRA Tik Tok contains very concise levels of physicality that are specific to the sport. In multiple videos, the few seconds before the run and the few seconds after are included in the physical performance and are ritualistic. Several cowgirls on the page show the same characteristics that can be seen as they complete a competitive barrel run. The notable physical characteristics are body placement, body movement, speed, hand/arm motion, and facial expression. Together these formulate the display of physical performance used by barrel racers and portrayed through Tik Tok.

In one instance, a post drew specific attention to barrel racer Bayleigh Choate and the athletic ability of the cowgirl. The post itself is a collection of 10 photos of a single barrel run, played back-to-back, which all have some physical aspect. There is particular attention to the placement of Choate's legs.



Figure 21: 4 consecutive screenshots of Bayleigh Choate, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

There is one photo where we see Choate lifting her leg around the barrel (a commonly used trick in barrel racing to avoid knocking the barrel over which results in a 5 second penalty) which in another video the viewer can hear the rodeo announcer make a comment about. There are several instances in which the viewer can see the intensity of the movement because the rider and horse are heavily leaning in relation to the ground. The intensity of the movement is verified by the progression of the movement through the photos.

Another aspect of physicality that is represented is the speed the horse and rider are going. This is made visible through video because the frames of a camera show movement. In multiple videos it is apparent the video is slowed down in certain parts, which also draws attention to the physical movement. In one post featuring barrel racer Laura Mote, she and her

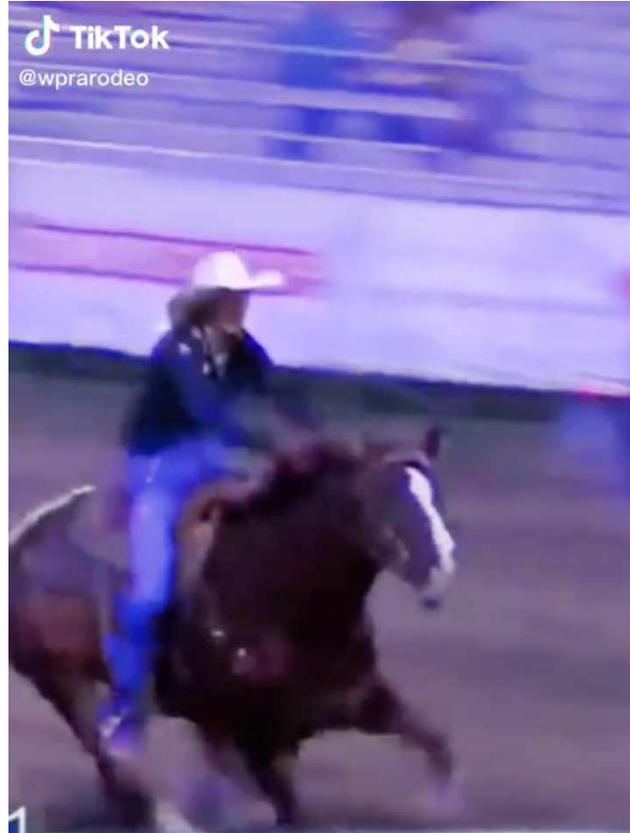


Figure 22: Barrel racer Laura Mote to show speed, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

horse are moving so quickly, the motion in the camera is blurred. The background is almost indistinguishable and even the horse is blurred from running so fast. This quality is noticeable across several posts where the camera is far away and recording the cowgirl running the barrel pattern.

The performance of the body in barrel racing as portrayed through the WPRA Tik Tok is consistent throughout the page. Regardless of which barrel racer is showcased in a particular post, there are similarities in the way physicality is shown. There are some barrel racers on the page who are above the age of 40, while not uncommon, is a definite representation of the expectation of women in rodeo to be high level athletic performance regardless of age.

While non-barrel racing performances of the body are limited on the WPRA page, there are a few instances where other physical actions are shown. In one video, barrel racer Sissy Winn



Figure 23: Barrel racer Sissy Winn, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

is doing an on-camera interview in which her horse is present. Her voice is heard over a video of her being physically affectionate toward the animal. Specifically, she is petting the horse's face and smiling and then shows her kissing the horse on the forehead. This is a physically intimate gesture, which portrays cowgirls as being affectionate, caring, and gentle while building the intricate relationship between horse and rider. While these are commonly associated with feminine characteristics, this directly conflicts the dominant narrative of cowgirls as rough and tough athletes. Therefore, cowgirls are being portrayed both as physically powerful while also maintaining that they are still caretakers.

Performance of the body is an important aspect of the way women in professional rodeo are represented in digital spaces. Due to the fact women in rodeo exist in a primarily male sport that is very physically demanding, there is a clear representation of barrel racers as strong

athletes who are tough and subject to similar physical demands of rodeo as cowboys are. However, the narrative also maintains that cowgirls are delicate and display feminine levels of emotional strength alongside their physical strength. While attitudes towards the role of women in the US is changing, being a caretaker is still a traditional stereotype of dominant US culture and the historical positionality of women (Donnelly et. al., 2015). Therefore, the data shown reflects US values in professional rodeo in the sense that the ideal body of a women is affectionate. However, the data also shows a push against this because women in rodeo are being portrayed as physically strong and being valued for that strength. This strength is shown and enhanced using video to create depictions of real-life barrel racing that are seen through the Tik Tok platform. Each of these depictions are selective in what is physically shown and builds a relationship between women in the sport of professional rodeo and their culturally rooted position.

4.4.3 Powerful Feminine Language to Build Collective Identity

The use of empowering and feminine language in the WPRA Tik Tok is consistent and appears in multiple forms to build a collective identity. This language is used to affirm the cowgirl identity and encourage the promotion of the competitors in online spaces. Additionally, this language encourages the cowgirl identity as an inherently feminine one, which is distinguishable from the cowboy from a cultural standpoint. Language used in captions, hashtags, and sounds are important indicators of the ways words can be used to create stories about WPRA athletes. For example, in one post the caption reads, “Bayleigh & Dash continue to Steal Our Hearts” (@wprarodeo, 2022). In another the caption reads, “Guess who’s back (wide eyes emoji) The team we all love, HAILEY and SISTER” (@wprarodeo, 2022). Both captions directly reference the barrel racer as someone who is to be admired with affection. This is a

distinct part of the barrel racer identity because cowgirls are seen as the affectionate beings and both captions maintain the importance of the horse and rider connection by directly naming the rider's horse. Another caption states "The Queen (crown emoji) & Famous Ladies Man" (@wprarodeo, 2022). The use of the word 'queen' is inherently feminine and while it does not identify the name of the barrel racer the post describes the barrel racer in the video, Bayleigh Choate, with a term that is socially known as being used to raise up women. Queen is a statement of Choate's position within the sport and calls attention to how barrel racers are recognized as capable. Similarly, the caption, "Perfection (crown emoji) @STEELY", uses the word perfection to describe barrel racer Steely Steiner (@wprarodeo, 2022). Perfection is affirming and suggests the barrel racer way of being, as represented by the WPRA barrel racers, is something that should be highly sought after.

Sounds are also reused by other Tik Tok users to build onto the already established digital cowgirl identity. The sport of rodeo, which is an individual sport in competition, also relies on social connections for individual success. The use of encouraging language aligns with the value of professional rodeo where athletes essentially root for each other even though they compete against each other. This community mentality is manifested using positive language, which constructs a sense of positive affirmation the WPRA has for its athletes and its branding.

Sound plays a distinct role in building the narrative around the gendered experience of women in rodeo. In one post, the sound opens with the voice of Adele⁶ saying "ladies and gentlemen, her", which is a commonly used soundbite, followed using a cover of the song *What's New* by Megan Thee Stallion⁷. The sound was edited together by WPRA and posted with a video

⁶ Grammy Award Winning, English pop music artist who is known for soulful voice with a contemporary pop flare (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023)

⁷ Grammy Award Winning Rapper whose work is known for addressing gender, race, and sex through body positivity (Biography.com, 2023).

of barrel racer Hailey Kinsel competing at a rodeo. The song contains the lyric, “better than your favorite bad bitch”, which is a powerful lyric to use to contribute to the narrative of cowgirls. This is powerful because using the phrase ‘bad bitch’ invokes an understanding of how women have been historically marginalized but over time have begun to reclaim themselves using the terms that were used to degrade them. This also invokes an understand of pop culture as it has morphed to be a place where women musical artists use their songs to push against the expectations of women by building new identities. The narrative being reinforced by this song choice on the post is that women in rodeo are strong, independent, and are not limited by their gender. The lyrics are also displayed as in-video closed captions so even if the viewer is watching without sound on their device, they still see the lyrics in word form. This use of sounds tells the story of cowgirls and in this example, uses a song with powerful language, which has innate feminine representation and pushes back against male dominant social hierarchy. Sounds on Tik Tok, which include song lyrics often display the words as closed captions on the video as well so not only are viewers hearing the audio but may also be seeing the words on-screen.

The other important use of sounds on Tik Tok are the re-use of sounds by other accounts. Every original sound on the WPRA account can be used by other accounts to create a video using that sound. In several instances, often, the WPRA original sounds are used by other accounts on top of rodeo related videos including barrel racing and other horse activities. Therefore, the use of original sounds allows the WPRA to expand their online community and create collective identity with the transference of ideologies through sounds. This use of distinct feminine language and collective branding through sounds on Tik Tok guides other users on how to use the cowgirl identity and interact with it themselves. The WPRA’s portrayal of their

athletes instigates the acceptable representations of cowgirls to both other folks in rodeo and outside audiences who see their content.



Figure 24: Screenshot from Kassie Mowry's interview, taken from @wprarodeo Tik Tok, 2022.

Other forms of sound appear as in-video voices or narration. On the WPRO account, there are two videos which showcase cowgirls directly speaking to the audience and describing their experience. In one instance, Kassie Mowry is shown on-screen giving an interview following her win at the Calgary Stampede in 2022. Mowry states in the interview: "I had some second thoughts when I got here and started second guessing some things" and "so happy to be here and it's just such a great accomplishment" (@wprarodeo, 2022). Mowry is shown in full

competition clothing with polished hair and makeup, which combined with the language she uses to describe her experience, tells the first-hand experience of a cowgirl in professional rodeo. While she had just won the Calgary Stampede and around \$50,000, Mowry maintains a humble attitude and poised speaking skills in the interview. These descriptors are also used in rodeo queen pageantry to describe the expected qualities of women in rodeo. In a rodeo queen pageant, contestants are judged and scored on their ability to speak on stage, perform in media interviews, and how they handle personal interviewing. This is a baseline, which serves as an expectation for how women in rodeo have to present themselves to be considered good enough to serve in professional rodeo by judges from the sport and the agriculture industry. WPRA and PRCA athletes are also expected to be able to participate in on-screen interviews during a rodeo. It is common for the local news or PRCA sanctioned news group to request athletes be interviewed following a win at a rodeo. Therefore, it is expected that these athletes can appear on camera and demonstrate they are a good representation of the sport of rodeo to outside audiences. This sets the unwritten social expectation that athletes must represent the sport in good light by being professional individuals with good people and speaking skills. This encompasses the expectation of women in rodeo as high-level professionals and for women, a high level of sophistication when it comes to presenting themselves on behalf of the WPRA. Using the WPRA account to showcase athletes directly speaking to the camera is another use of the affordances of the platform to communicate values to audiences in a personable way that identifies valued characteristics of cowgirls.

In one post featuring barrel racer Hailey Kinsel, the caption read, "Hailey Kinsel & Sister are at it again winning \$3,000 at Bremerton & \$7,000 at Kennewick makes her the Female Athlete of the Week!" (@wprarodeo, 2022). This use of language to uplift the successes of

cowgirls in professional rodeo support the notion that the WPRA is portraying these athletes using positive language. These digital affirmations are consistent throughout the page and the page consistently uses captions to not only explain the subject of the video but to emphasize the cowgirls' successes. This contribution to the narrative about women in rodeo as highly successful and capable. By portraying the narratives that women are a supportive collective who root for each other in their successes contributes to the dominant narrative in rodeo, which separates expectations of women from men. Women can freely rely on their relationships with others, and it does not demonstrate weakness. The support of the WPRA to their athletes on Tik Tok shows women supporting women and using social media to send that message to the larger audience.

The WPRA Tik Tok page uses consistent hashtags to form a collective identity of the organization and promote their ideologies. Hashtags are not only a practical way to reach more viewers due to the mechanics of them but also a way to add additional language to an individual post. This language is sometimes simple or seemingly a minimal additive but can add to the overall message. Almost every single post on the WPRA page includes similar groupings of hashtags, which include: #cowgirl #barrelracer and #wprarodeo. These hashtags have an inherently feminine connotation and are building collective identity around the cowgirl as they are used continuously across posts. This keeps consistent language and branding on the WPRA page regardless of how many posts one viewer might see, even if it's one. These types of hashtags also collectively separate the WPRA from other rodeo entities on social media and define their narrative about themselves. This narrative is one that portrays the WPRA and its athletes as confident in their brand and consistent in their belief about what makes a cowgirl a cowgirl. This portrayal of confidence in femininity is a part of the gender performance that

reflects the dominant narrative of women in rodeo. Women in rodeo are expected to be professionals who maintain positive relationships with their sponsors as well as when working with people outside of the barrel racing arena. This performance of gender speaks to the ways women are experiencing gender through the relationships they have with others and are constructing these relationships based on social rules.

The @wprarodeo Tik Tok displays cultural ideologies of the rodeo industry in relation to how the cowgirl has been culturally and historically situated. Physical appearance including the way a cowgirl dresses and wears her hair and makeup are important characteristics, which are influenced by how women fit themselves into rodeo culture. The performance of the cowgirl body is also another ideology, which surfaces on Tik Tok. The page highlights athleticism, toughness, and durability while also maintaining women in rodeo as affectionate and emotionally connected. This conflicting portrayal of the body stems from the cultural value of women in agriculture as needing to be strong to be successful while still being objects of beauty. The final cultural ideology displayed on the WPRA page is collective identity, which is built through feminine language and empowerment. The practice of using Tik Tok to portray the cowgirl identity as it is situated in larger rodeo culture reinforces stereotypes about the identity while also providing a space for the empowerment of the cowgirl and collectively, their representation in the sport of rodeo.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Overview

This research shows how women in rodeo on the @wprarodeo Tik Tok use the platform to reinforce the stereotypes around the cowgirl identity. The goal of this study was to understand the ways gender performance as it exists on social media contributes to the overall narrative of women in rodeo. The research questions aimed to understand how gender performance reinforced or reflected traditional cowgirl stereotypes and how those narratives were afforded by Tik Tok. The study shows that while women in rodeo on Tik Tok do facilitate stereotypes through their gender performance, this performance also challenges traditional notions of women's strength and creates an environment for women empowerment. Tik Tok affords the ability for the WPRA to build collective identity using traditional characteristics of the cowgirl, but it also affords the ability of the organization to brand itself using their values to show the value of the cowgirl.

Tik Tok affords the narrative of the WPRA and its members that demonstrates traditional idealisms associated with women in the US and in western culture. The traditional representation of women in western culture is that they are beautiful and frail without physical power. This includes having both social and physical vulnerability which is part of how women are socially defined (Butler, 2004). However, rodeo is providing a narrative on Tik Tok that they are in fact physically powerful and should be admired for this. Using the affordances of video editing in combination with sounds and other visual cues on the platform, the narrative is not only reinforced but interacted with by large, young audiences. In addition to being an ideal of traditional views of rodeo culture, this narrative reflects the ideals of traditional feminism

because the US values women who are exceptionally good at a physical sport. This is because they are compared to men and men are valued in western culture for being physically and mentally powerful. This comparison is the social norm that facilitates the narrative of women in rodeo as being admirable because of their physical attributes and overall toughness. More specifically, this aligns with US ideals traditionally associated with patriotism and reinforces the heteronormative power structure because the value is on strong women who are still inherently beautiful under the norms of the culture. While patriotism is usually defined along the bounds of love and pride in a country and the associated symbols, patriotism in the US is more nuanced (Pena & Sidanius, 2022). In the United States patriotism is typically associated with the conservative political parties and the symbols of the American Flag, the red, white and blue colors, and other symbolic indicators. However, it is socially built on the idea of a dominant social group who believe in the nuclear family structure and heteronormative relationships (Sear, 2016). These values are intertwined with rodeo and the people who are involved in it. Therefore, women in rodeo are subject to having to fit themselves into these values and the influence they have on how gender is performed because there is an expectation to be a player in not only values of rodeo, but subsequently, values of patriotism in the US.

Women must fall into the expectations of what is considered feminine to fit the gender roles of women and must be exceptionally great at what they do to be recognized for accomplishments. Any deviation from the social expectations that reinforce these values could put women's success in rodeo on the line, which says something about the power social structure plays in the facilitation of gender experience. Therefore, the WPRA is portraying the values of traditionally patriotic western culture that reinforces these ideals to outside audiences. This reinforcement of traditional stereotypes associated with rodeo and agriculture more broadly are

reaffirmed to outside audiences through social media platforms such as Tik Tok. The platform itself is also facilitating the story through a complex model where multiple types of content can be posted and interacted with in many ways. This model leaves room for audiences to interpret and perceive information about subjects they aren't familiar with and are basing their interpretations off the different parts of the content that create meaning.

This study has implications on how historically marginalized identities are using social media platforms to initiate the building of collective identity and portraying narratives, which align with the values of that group. This research is transferable to other research regarding marginalized groups in online spaces. It also allows broader discussion on the ways women in rodeo are seen in digital spaces and how they are perceived by audiences. There is still more to be done to fully understand the implications of the results of this study including how the perpetuation of stereotypes and the facilitation of them on online platforms interacts with audiences both outside of agriculture and within the culture. While the WPRA account displays consistent characteristics of traditional cowgirl stereotypes, there is a use of those characteristics to build community and create empowering language for women to be confident and proud of their place in rodeo.

5.2 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was used to ensure consistency within the study and make sure the information is credible. To ensure this, the pretest served as a mechanism to ensure that in the actual study, the proposed analysis was applicable and followed the important themes and concepts outlined. Using the three components of CTDA including the technology, the technology practice, and the cultural ideologies presented in the Tik Tok videos, the pretest demonstrates how the analysis could be applied to the WPRA page. While the two pages of Tik

Tok between the pretest and actual study are different, they contain similar components. These components include gender performance in relation to the cowgirl experience and both pages contained videos of WPRA competitor(s). The analysis of the pretest reinforced the trustworthiness of the project because they used the same data collection and analysis procedures.

5.3 Limitations

There are limitations to this study including the use of the WPRA page as a single representation of women in rodeo. The page itself has limited content and content taken from a relatively short time. The other aspect which is important to note is that the page highlights specific WPRA athletes but the identity of the actual person posting the content is unknown. As previously mentioned, the content on the page is limited because there is solely barrel racing featured on the page and only two videos not of barrel racing itself. Breakaway roping and other settings involving the WPRA members are missing from the data. Most videos appear to be taken from professional recordings of rodeos that are used for television and therefore does not include a lot of original content by the WPRA or person who runs the page. Disclaimers as a part of Tik Tok's interface are another limitation because the understanding of how and when they are placed on videos is not well understood or researched. If users on the platform do not fully understand why these warnings are placed on videos, they may be easier to disregard as unimportant or not valid.

Additionally, CTDA as a methodology requires three highly complex components of analysis, which can be difficult to extract and use in complete effectiveness (Brock, 2016). This study seeks to understand cultural ideology more broadly while not looking at one specific thing and is limited by the content that was present. Women of color and diverse versions of the

cowgirl were not present on the page. There is only one main focal representation of the cowgirl, which disregards rodeo historically being influenced by cowgirls of color.

5.4 Future Research

Future research in this topic area can work on the expansion of CTDA as a methodology to understand gender performance across any social media platform. The procedures of this study are transferable to other social media and could use the theoretical framework to analyze other marginalized groups. As gender performance continues to make the transition in research from real life to online spaces, more research can be geared towards analyzing those performances in digital spaces to become more generalizable. This research also gives insight for the rodeo and agriculture industry to understand how their culture is represented in digital spaces. This broadens research for agriculture studies and communication studies more largely.

Future research could also further the understanding of the intersection of gender and race as it relates to rodeo. With the majority of professional rodeo being white, the experiences and narratives are defined through the white lens. Therefore, there is still more to be understood about how race plays a role in the culture of professional rodeo because while Black and Hispanic athletes are present, they are not represented as much. There is potential for studies into professional rodeo athletes of color and their representation on Tik Tok or other forms of social media. Specifically, an analysis geared towards understanding why there is less representation whether it is because of lack of content or lack of opportunity for athletes of color to compete at high levels. Additionally, the history of agriculture has been shaped by minority identities but are still missing from literature. More specifically, the intersection of gender and race can be researched by delving into the history of Black women in rodeo who are missing from research and analyzing their representation on different social media. This elimination of this

representation erases the history of people of color in rodeo of today and tells only the story of rodeo shaped by whiteness and idealisms traditionally associated with the dominant heteronormative power structure in the US.

5.5 Concluding Summary

CTDA as a methodology uses technology, technology interface, and cultural ideology to understand how digital content exists in digital spaces and how meaning is created in those contexts. Using CTDA the ways women in rodeo present themselves on social media was analyzed to understand both how rodeo organizations are using Tik Tok and how the subjects of the content are situated in the historical and cultural context. This analysis will provide insight for the agriculture industry into how content is being created, shared, and circulated amongst audiences. It will provide insight into how Tik Tok as a new platform can be used to tell stories about agriculture-based organizations and how that narrative is being perceived. Agriculture and the sport of rodeo have always struggled with negative perceptions from outsiders perpetuated in digital spaces. This includes issues dealing with treatment of animals, animal rights, and the use of livestock in rodeo that are highly contested by outside groups. Issues like these often surface on social media and are a main cause of social media debates circulating with rodeo content about animals in rodeo. This tension can be lessened with the use of informed practitioners to understand how their content is perpetuating certain values and inform them on how to deal with these types of public relations issues regarding animal treatment. The industry needs to align their values surrounding the proper treatment of animals with people who have misconceptions about animal welfare in professional rodeo. Practitioners and communicators of agriculture need to understand the social powers and values they are perpetuating in order to better reach outside audiences who perceive them to be negative. Public relations practice can use this type of

research to understand how to better handle crisis situations and handle potential PR issues that are common in professional rodeo and agriculture.

Reflexivity Statement

As a young woman preparing for a career in rural media, I hope to use this research to understand how I can be a better communicator for agriculture as well as begin to challenge the problematic reinforcement of dominant powers in rodeo, in agriculture, and in the world. While there is a certain level of cooperation necessary for the sport of rodeo to function successfully in agriculture, there is a space for young women to push against the traditional norms that place us as somehow inferior to men in the industry. I believe this work will help me navigate the rural media industry and use my knowledge of the innerworkings of social powers to craft stories of women in agriculture that can challenge stereotypes, push against negative perceptions, and reconstruct the way agriculture communicates with audiences.

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