

Application Assignment – Content Analysis

This assignment will require you to analyze and organize message content in a simplified version of a content analysis.

1. Researchers who decide to conduct a content analysis do so because they are hoping to find answers to their research question by analyzing existing artifacts/texts. To complete this assignment, you'll need to develop a research question that you can answer by conducting a simplified content analysis. This can be *any* research question; it does not need to be the question you have been using throughout the semester (though you are welcome to use it if it works for this assignment). Write your research question here:

In what ways have popular songs from the U.S. changed in their depiction of romantic love since 1960?

2. Describe, in detail, what content you would analyze if you were doing a full content analysis study. Then, indicate which sampling technique you would use to create a sample of artifacts to study (for example, if you decided to analyze tv shows about the workplace, and then selected a specific number of episodes, describe that and indicate what type of sampling technique that is):

I would take two popular songs that refer to a romantic relationship from each year starting in 1960 (two years after the Billboard Hot 100 was established), and I would identify the subject matter (i.e. is it about being in a loving relationship? a breakup?), recurring themes, and use of language when referring to love. The songs would range from the likes of Elvis Presley's hit "It's Now or Never" from 1960 to 2023's "Flowers" by Miley Cyrus, along with all the other top songs from over the years in between. To choose these songs, I would first find a list of the top songs from each year using the Billboard 100 and select two using a random number generator. Because love is a common subject in songwriting, at least one of these songs will likely refer to romantic love to some capacity; if not, I will have the generator select again until both chosen songs depict romantic love. If only one song refers to romantic love, I will use it and continue to randomly generate songs until I find another that also refers to romantic love. After I have my songs chosen, I will proceed to identify the aforementioned song characteristics.

3. Choose a smaller subset of the sample to use for the assignment (for example, one episode of a tv show, one day's worth of social media posts, one website, etc.). Describe what you have chosen to analyze here:

I will compare one hit song from 1960 to a hit song from 2023. For this small subset of the sample, I will choose two random songs that made it to the Billboard Hot 100 from both years, which are “Boy’s a Liar Pt. 2” by PinkPantheress and IceSpice (which ended up at #20 in 2023) and “My Heart Has a Mind of its Own” by Connie Francis (which ended up at #17 in 1960). Both songs are about a romantic relationship in which the woman still expresses some interest in the man, though the relationship is over in “My Heart Has a Mind of its Own” and the status of the relationship is unclear in “Boy’s a Liar Pt. 2”, where the singer implies the man cheated on her. I’m choosing to analyze how the singers depict their relationship with the man, and I’m especially interested in seeing the difference in tone when referring to romance between the two.

4. Analyze the content of what you selected in step 3. More specifically, write down all instances that occur that are relevant to your research question. Create this list in your own notes. Do not write anything here for #4.

5. Analyze your list of instances and create categories based on what you see. Do this in your notes; do not write anything here for #5.

6. Place each of the instances you made note of in step 4 in its appropriate category from step 5. Copy and paste your full list of categories and instances here:

- **Subject matter:**
 - Romantic relationship with a man from the perspective of a woman
 - Separation (MHHaMoIO)
 - “You're not in love with me, so why can't I forget I'm just your used to be?”
 - Unstable relationship, nearing separation (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “If you don't speak, does that mean we're through?”
 - Cheating (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “Like that boy is a cap, sayin' he home but I know where he at”
 - “Bet he [explicit – getting intimate with another girl]”
- **Themes:**
 - Insecurity
 - “Every time I pull my hair, well, it's only out of fear That you'll find me ugly and one day you'll disappear” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “Was I ever good enough?” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - Longing

- “When I’m with someone new, I always think of you” (MHHaMoIO)
- “I can’t dismiss the memory of your kiss” (MHHaMoIO)
- “No matter what I say, no matter how I try, I just can’t turn the other way” (MHHaMoIO)
- “You’re not in love with me, so why can’t I forget I’m just your used to be?” (MHHaMoIO)
- “I know forgetting you would be a hopeless thing” (MHHaMoIO)
- “I say I’ll let you go, but then my heart says no” (MHHaMoIO)
- **Language:**
 - Explicit/Sexualized
 - “grabbin’ my duh-duh-duh” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “Thinkin’ ‘bout [explicit] that I shouldn’t have (huh)” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “Bet he [explicit – getting intimate with another girl], Thinkin’ ‘bout me ‘cause he know that [explicit] fat (damn)” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “Duckin’ my [explicit], ‘cause he know what I’m on (grrah)” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “Don’t like sneaky [explicit] that you do (grrah)” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - Metaphorical
 - “For I’m a puppet, and I just can’t seem to break the string” (MHHaMoIO)
 - Antagonizing/Belittling
 - “His girl is a bum to me” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “...that boy is a cap” (BaL Pt. 2)
 - “The-the boy’s a liar, the boy’s a liar” (repeated) (BaL Pt. 2)

7. Count the number of instances in each category. Tell me what the patterns/categories are showing you, and how they help to answer your research question:

The 1960 song “My Heart Has a Mind of Its Own” is significantly less explicit, less demeaning, and has no instances of the narrator feeling insecure. The 2023 song “The Boy’s a Liar (Pt. 2)” is filled with more degrading language of the narrator herself, the man, and the woman she thinks he’s cheating on her with. While both narrators are unhappy with the direction of their relationship, the 1960 song’s narrator is self-contained and doesn’t belittle her former lover (or anyone else). Because the sample size is tiny, these two examples don’t encompass all songs that refer to romantic love between 1960 and the present, and the subjects of both differ. In a large sample size, the general idea would be sought out and the specific subject matter of each song would be less important, but it’s emphasized in this small sample and may account for the more extreme

differences (implied cheating is different from a regular breakup). Other differences are evidently because of the time they were written in; the 2020s are a lot less modest about romance than the 1960s, when the use of explicit language would be a lot more taboo.

Another interesting finding was the narrator's dependence on appearance in the 2023 song, which holds little importance in the 1960 song. The 1960 song never mentions the narrator's looks, while the 2023 song drills in that appearance is an important factor in romantic relationships; it's the cause of both her insecurity and her belittling of another woman. It seems like the 2023 song relies a lot more heavily on appearance and sex appeal while the 1960 song is primarily emotion-based, with more sullen lyrics about longing than the antagonistic lyrics of the 2023 song. If more samples were examined and resulted in similar findings, this would support that romantic relationships are depicted as more unstable, shallow, and bitter now than they were in the past.