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REDNECKS AND HILLBILLIES: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE
CONSTRUCTION OF PRIDE AND HIGH SELF-ESTEEM EXHIBITED BY
SOUTHERN CHARACTERS

BY CASEY R. WHITE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Major in Sociology

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2020

DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE PAGE

Casey White

This dissertation is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree and is acceptable for meeting the dissertation requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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Date

This dissertation is dedicated to the two most important people in my life. I would like to thank my husband Wil Massey. You supported and encouraged me every step of the way. It is because of you I made it this far and I couldn't have done it without you. I also want dedicate my work to my daughter Lillian Victricia White. You came into this world as the happiest of surprises. I read you chapters of my dissertation while you were in my stomach and once born you slept in lap as I wrote the last few chapters. I finished this dissertation for you. I hope someday you'll read this and be proud of the work your mother did to be a good role model for you and I hope you will have big dreams for your future.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	10
CHAPTER 3. THEORY.....	37
CHAPTER 4. METHODS.....	55
CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS	68
CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION	115
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION	148
APPENDIX A	152
APPENDIX B.....	153
BIBLIOGRAPHY	154

ABSTRACT

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CASEY R. WHITE

2020

The purpose of this study is to examine television shows portraying redneck and hillbilly culture from 2010 to 2017 to examine the limitations of focusing on traditional stereotypes about southern culture when understanding the complexities of redneck and hillbilly society. According to a literature review, redneck and hillbilly characters have historically been associated with poverty, have been used as comedic symbols to portray southerners in the lower classes as jokes, and the terms have been used as insults. A thematic analysis was conducted analyzing redneck/hillbilly themed television shows from the years 2010 through 2017 to examine them for the presence of traditional stereotypes and to discuss changes in television shows over time to include non-traditional, positive stereotypes that now make-up docudrama and reality television show portrayals of rednecks and hillbillies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“He's some redneck. He's rich and successful, unconcerned about much apart from...goofin' off and having his family close by. He's famous, a compelling figure on a TV show watched by millions. How he got here doesn't bother him much. Money in the bank for being yourself – that's all it is...The rise of redneck culture snuck up on us.” (John Doyle 2018)

From the 1960s to the early 2000s, southern characters in the media have entertained audiences with their comedy and their culture. From Jed Clampett on the Beverly Hillbillies in the 1960s to Willie Robertson on Duck Dynasty in the early 2000s, redneck and hillbilly themed television shows have continued to be popular amongst viewers over time. While redneck and hillbilly stereotypes existed before the 1900s, television’s fascination with southern characters has had two dominate periods: the rural revolution in the 1960s (Bullard 2017) and the redneck revolution in the 2000s (Globe and Mail 2013, Good Morning America 2012). While both periods are known for the creation of numerous television shows with a southern theme, comparing the eras illuminates numerous changes over time in how southerners and redneck/hillbilly culture appear in television shows. Over the years, southern stereotypes in television shows have both evolved and stayed the same.

This study will present past research conducted discussing southern themed television shows as a vehicle for comedy and how historically, rednecks and hillbillies have been synonymous with the television genre of comedy. Through independent research, this study will examine how in the 2000s southern television themes shifted from the genre of comedy to the world of reality television and docudramas. Based on this study, the introduction of southern-themed television shows into the genres of reality

television and docudramas led to significant changes in the portrayal of southerners. Rednecks and hillbillies in reality television and docudramas are not solely comedic icons in the 2000s. Redneck and hillbilly characters evolved to have more positive attributes displaying high self-esteem and praise for southern culture. This dissertation seeks to analyze the evolution of southern culture and how it is portrayed in the 2000s to determine the impact of reality television and docudrama genres on the redneck and hillbilly character.

Background of the Rural Revolution and the Redneck Revolution

According to Bullard (2017), the rise of the “rural revolution” in television featuring "redneck" or working-class southern characters took place in the 1960s. It was during this time that media outlets like CBS focused on developing comedy shows to attract viewers and also to counter serious real-world news like events concerning the war in Vietnam and the War on Poverty (Bullard 2017). The rural revolution was a time of television show development focusing on themes of southern culture. Redneck, hillbilly, and working-class southern characters delivered fictionalized comedic situations to viewers by playing into traditional stereotypes showing southerners as ignorant, backwoods, naive, and as uncultured. They did this while displaying wholesome images such as close family structures, good morals, and happy endings. By the 1970s, the charm of southern characters had run its course, and a mass cancelation of southern-themed shows occurred labeled the "rural purge" (Bullard 2017).

Eventually, a new revolution would come about in the 2000s. The news outlets, the Globe and Mail (2013) and Good Morning America (2012) would label this period in

their articles as the "redneck revolution" where southern themed television shows rose again in popularity (Doyle 2012; Robins 2014). Television shows like *Swamp People*, *Rocket City Rednecks*, *Duck Dynasty*, *My Big Redneck Wedding*, and more made redneck and hillbilly characters fashionable again. While many shows produced from 2010-2017 used the same stereotypes about southern culture for comedic purposes as was used in the 1960s, noticeable differences do exist.

Changes in Southern Themed Television Shows From 2010-2017

In the early 2000s, instead of CBS, other media outlets like the Discovery Channel, the Travel Channel, CMT, and the History Channel paved the way for the comeback of southern-themed media popularity. While being comedic in some forms, many of the shows created during the redneck revolution were categorized as reality television shows or docudramas. Reality television is defined as "... a genre of television programming that presents purportedly unscripted dramatic or sometimes humorous situations, documents actual events, and usually features ordinary people instead of professional actors.... ("What is Reality Television?" 2016)." A docudrama is defined as "a television program whose story is based on an event or situation that really happened, although it is not accurate in every detail (Cambridge Dictionary)." Within the realm of reality television and docudramas, television show themes revolve around the idea that situations portrayed are based on real-life events. While CBS in the 1960s created fictionalized comedies about southern life, outlets like the History Channel and the Discovery Channel reinvented rednecks and hillbillies to feature "real" southern culture and "real" life events (Bullard 2017; Doyle 2012; & Robins 2014).

According to this study, the change in networks developing southern-themed television shows and the change of genres featuring these shows is an important topic to discuss when trying to understand shifts in the portrayal of rednecks and hillbillies in the media over time. The redneck and hillbilly characters of the 2000s may be remarkably similar to the ones created in the 1960s. However because modern southern-themed shows have been developed by networks focusing on producing material that is educational and contains more realistic representations of southern life, we see changes in representation of redneck and hillbilly stereotypes. From the 1960s to the 2000s, southern characters share commonalities like being members of the working-class, as being seen as less intelligent and less sophisticated by outsiders, as the target of jokes, as living in trailers and being poor, and as having low-status mannerisms and language. Based on this study, rednecks and hillbillies went from being comedic icons in the 1960s to having comedic elements along with being sources of educational and cultural material in the 2000s. While in the 1960s, viewers watched "The Beverly Hillbillies" navigate scripted, fictional comedic situations trying to live in Beverly Hills, California, in the 2000s, viewers watched self-proclaimed redneck Travis Taylor on "Rocket City Rednecks" educate viewers on how a redneck with a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering could use stereotypical southern culture to design a complex device to make rocket fuel out of moonshine (Lopez 2011; Bullard 2017).

A review of the literature demonstrated that few changes in the portrayal of southern characters since the 1960s exists and that academic research has focused on negative attributes and on comparing southern portrayals in the media to historical uses of the concepts redneck and hillbilly. From a literature review, the genre of comedy has

been the leading category in movies and television to use portrayals of southern stereotypes; therefore, research available focuses on comedy portrayals. There is an agreement amongst researchers that redneck and hillbilly themes in television features characters using negative imagery. Rednecks and hillbillies display southern characters as unintelligent, as living in poverty, and as associated with low class behaviors (Davis 2010; Huber 1995; Schafft and Jackson 2010).

Based on gaps in the literature, researchers have not addressed how southern cultural portrayals have now drifted from the realm of comedy to the genres of reality television and docudramas. According to this study, the change in genres is important because docudramas and reality television shows have a common theme of attempting to feature characters in real life situations or portraying real events, which can impact how southerners might be portrayed if compared to past representations. By portraying what audiences believe to be real people acting in real life, audiences are given a more complex view of the redneck/hillbilly character. Television networks like the History Channel and the Discovery Channel have historically featured television shows that are designed to entertain and educate. These shows help people understand, learn, and become aware of history or culture in some fashion. By airing southern-themed television shows on these channels, audiences might believe they are viewing realistic southern culture. When addressing gaps within existing literature on rednecks and hillbillies in the media, this is another topic that academic research has not adequately addressed. How are southern themed-television shows in the genres of reality television and docudramas different than comedy television shows of the past? Because there is an element of realism and education to many modern southern themed shows, the focus is not

necessarily on comedy but on portraying everyday life. While humor is apparent in plotlines from these shows, other serious elements may also exist.

Based on this study, rednecks and hillbillies from 2010-2017 television shows are educated, feature equality between men and women, feature women in more dominant roles, have a focus on family and ancestry, have characters displaying wealth, and focus on men and women who have occupations revolving around their life living in the south. These features display southern characters more positively than in the past. While the same negative stereotypes from past media representations still exist, viewers can also witness positive displays of southern culture. While academic research has plenty of data on negative imagery, there is a lack of examinations on positive imagery and ways southern characters deviate from past representations.

Statement of Purpose

How do southern characters in television shows from 2010-2017 display positive attributes and differ from past portrayals of redneck and hillbilly characters? The purpose of this study is to examine the positive attributes redneck and hillbilly characters portray in the genres of reality television and docudramas, and how high self-esteem and pride are visible in television shows aired from 2010-2017 featuring southern cultures. The portrayal of southern characters labeled as rednecks/hillbillies was examined to determine if redneck/hillbilly characters differ in ways from past portrayals by containing positive imagery displaying rednecks/hillbillies as people with high self-esteem and pride.

Based on a review of the literature, it was predicted that rednecks/hillbillies in television shows from 2010-2017 would a) display wealth; b) have a middle/upper class

social status; c) show evidence of being educated; d) show women in more dominant and untraditional roles, and e) display symbols of southern culture that demonstrate pride and high self-esteem (ancestry/family relations, hunting/tool use, religion, patriotism, etc.). It was also predicted that television shows from 2010-2017 would agree with the findings of past research on hillbilly/rednecks in the media: as portrayed as comedic caricatures of low-status southern culture; as following historical stereotypes showing rednecks/hillbillies as undesirable; dirty; dominated by masculinity; featuring females as secondary characters who follow traditional female roles as mothers, wives, homemakers, etc.

This study chose to differ from past research models by focusing on how rednecks and hillbillies are portrayed positively in television shows and could potentially be viewed by audiences as containing elements of pride and high self-esteem. With the rise of popularity in television genres like reality television and docudramas, filmmakers have created a wide variety of redneck television shows that fit into these genres. Historically, redneck/hillbilly portrayals in the media have been in the genre of comedy, but modern television shows have moved to more serious or educational displays of low-status southern cultures by being designed as reality television or docudrama shows. The History Channel and the Discovery Channel, for example, feature several docudramas featuring redneck/hillbilly culture (Rocket City Rednecks, Swamp People, Moonshiners, and Hillbilly Blood). For this study, redneck/hillbilly television shows in the genres of docudramas and reality television were examined to determine how portrayals of rednecks/hillbillies differed from past displays of southern cultures in comedy genres to determine if more positive imagery exists.

Theoretical Model

The work of Blake E. Ashforth and Glen E. Kreiner (1999) was used to develop a theoretical model to assist in understanding how southern characters identifying as redneck/hillbilly construct feelings of pride and high self-esteem. This model was used to present a tool to aid in understanding how modern rednecks/hillbillies in television show displays of pride and high-self esteem while constructing an image that is seen as low-status by mainstream society.

The work of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) was also used to interpret the data collected for this dissertation. Berger and Luckmann developed the theory of the social construction of reality, which examines how individuals and groups interacting in society shapes perceptions of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Television shows can shape peoples' perceptions using media images. Television shows about southern culture use imagery that both positively and negatively influences perceptions about southern culture. According to Darling (2009), the concept of being a redneck is socially constructed and there are objective layers that exist in the social construction of the working-class.

Research Methods

For this study, a thematic analysis was used to analyze television shows aired between 2010-2017, in the genres of reality television and docudramas, featuring redneck/hillbilly characters and/or a working-class southern theme. A sample of 110 episodes from redneck/hillbilly themed television shows airing from 2010-2017 was coded and analyzed to determine common themes related to displays of pride or high

self-esteem exhibited by characters. A thematic coding scheme was developed based on common themes in the literature showing ways television shows in the 2000s might potentially differ from past research by displaying positive imagery. Themes include displays of religion, education, patriotism, masculinity, non-traditional/traditional behaviors of female characters, occupation, wealth and material possessions, stereotypical behaviors, ancestry/family, and the inclusion of diversity and outsiders to a culture. Once coded to determine common themes existing that could explain how modern southern television shows display rednecks/hillbillies as having pride and high self-esteem, a theoretical model was applied to help understand the significance of the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006).

Organization of The Dissertation

This dissertation is organized using seven chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the topic and an overview of the contents of this dissertation. Chapter two is a literature review examining past research conducted about southern stereotypes in the media and common themes past researchers have focused on. Chapter three is a discussion of the work of Blake E. Ashforth and Glen E. Kreiner and how their theoretical framework was used to develop a model applicable in understanding the positive imagery displayed by southern characters in redneck/hillbilly television shows. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology used to conduct a thematic analysis on southern stereotypes in the media. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the results and findings of the content analysis conducted for this study. Chapter 7 concludes this research and summarizes the significant findings, and discusses limitations and future research areas.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter discusses past academic research on rednecks, hillbillies, and southern stereotypes in the media and is organized by common topics found in the literature. First, research on historical information about the terms hillbilly and redneck will be presented to offer an understanding of how these terms developed over time and their meanings. Next, studies about rednecks, hillbillies, and southern stereotypes will be discussed and organized by common themes found in the literature. The first theme is the use of southern culture as a tool for humor and comedy. The second theme is the use of rednecks and hillbillies as concepts to reinforce inequality in terms of classism, gender, and racism. Lastly, research on changes in the definitions and concepts of rednecks and hillbillies, and how southern culture is socially constructed in the media will be discussed.

It is important to note the use of language in the following literature review. Authors within this literature review define situations differently using various terms (low-status, low-class, working-class, and underclass). For the purpose of this literature review, the language and terminology used by different authors was included in descriptions of their research because their specific terminology applies to the work they conducted. For the purpose of this dissertation, in the following chapters, I am using the following terms and definitions based on the research I have conducted.

Based on a review of the literature, the term “low-status” is defined as a social position in society ranked low in social hierarchies and is one of the most common terms used by past researchers focusing on redneck and hillbilly topics to describe aspects of southern cultures (Beech 2004; Car 1996; Goad 1997; Harkins 2003; Newitz 1996; and Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003). Using this definition as a guidepost, for this study, the term low-status will be considered a broad term encompassing a) individuals or groups labeled as redneck or hillbilly who have a low social ranking within society; b) individuals with characteristics representing redneck or hillbilly stereotypes stigmatized by mainstream society; c) individuals holding a working-class, low-class, or underclass status; and d) characters who exhibit behaviors, thoughts, and actions labeled as undesirable by mainstream society within the hierarchy existing in the United States. Mainstream society refers to the culture of a widely held number of individuals within United States society and the dominant belief system they hold that reinforces social norms (Thomas 2016). In the case of southern stereotypes, mainstream society views redneck and hillbilly culture as violating social norms and stereotypes and stigmas have evolved to describe ways they violate social norms

According to Rubin et al. (2014), when discussing socioeconomic status, labels are determined by both social and economic factors. Working-class, low-class, and underclass are terms that define both the social and economic status of individuals. Working-class for example could mean an individual has very little wealth or no wealth but socially can have a high social position within their social group. For this study, the terms low-class, working-class, middle-class, upper-class, and underclass will take into

account both economic and social positions to determine the appropriate term to describe redneck and hillbilly culture.

From the literature, past researchers typically place redneck and hillbilly culture in the lower social classes and label individuals as working-class or low-class. Working-class is defined as individuals who hold a work identity that is typically low-status and requires manual or industrial type work for low wages (Beech 2004; Harkins 2003; Huber 1994; and Jarosz and Lawson 2002). In this study, redneck and hillbilly characters in the sample are labeled as working-class if they are shown participating in an occupation typically considered by mainstream society as working-class and are portrayed as having little or no signs of wealth.

Low-class is used by past researchers typically to refer to individuals of the poorer social classes or who exhibit traits or behaviors ranking low in social hierarchies (examples: lower levels of education, low-status languages, low-status clothing, living in trailers, self-identifying as redneck or hillbilly, etc.) (Goad 1997; Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). For the purpose of this project, low-class represents redneck and hillbilly characters who represent concepts associated with poverty, lack of education, and low-status cultural aspects frowned upon and unaccepted by mainstream society.

A combination of the definitions for the term underclass given in Duane Carr's (1996) research and Anthony Harkins (2003) research will be used to define people in poverty and those who are not employed (Car 1996), and individuals socially constructed to be a white "other" category pertaining to the unique culture found within redneck and hillbilly cultures that separates them from mainstream white culture (Harkins 2003). Underclass is a common term used by past researchers when discussing redneck and

hillbillies from a historical perspective and their social status within society. Underclass is a term more commonly used by past researchers, and will be included when deemed appropriate for this project.

It is important to note there may be overlap between these different terms. Someone may occupy the working-class and also be labeled low-status and low-class. An individual can be labeled as a member of the underclass and also be a member of the lower-class and be considered low-status. These terms are similar but significantly different and will be used when appropriate for this project.

The terms stereotype and stigma are also important to understand for this study. A stereotype is a belief or idea that is widely held by a consensus of people within a society (Haslam et al. 1998). For this study, the term stereotype refers to ideas attached to redneck and hillbilly culture that developed over time from the 1900s to the 2000s (Goad 1997; Carr 1996; Newitz 1996; Harkins 2003; Huber 1994). The term stigma refers to a label placed on an individual that is symbolic of some type of negative quality considered shameful (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999).

Hillbillies, Rednecks, and White trash: A Brief History of Terminology

To understand modern stereotypes attached to the words "redneck" and "hillbilly," it is essential to know the historical background of these terms and how these stereotypes initially developed. Even though numerous words can be used to depict low-status southerners in the United States, the words redneck, hillbilly, and white trash are most commonly used when developing themes about southern culture in different forms of

media consumed by audiences for entertainment (Carr 1996; Newitz 1996; Goad 1997; Huber 1994; Harkins 2003).

Rednecks, hillbillies, poor white trash, yokels, hayseeds, hicks, clay-eaters, peckerwoods, sandhillers, crackers, honkies, along with numerous other terms, can all be traced to the white American underclass. The underclass included the poor and unemployed who were considered the lowest social status in society (Goad 1997; Carr 1996). There are different theories as to where the white American underclass containing poor and unemployed members of society originated. First, in Duane Carr's (1996) research, he discusses how some Sociologists trace American contempt of the poorer classes to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Lutherism and Calvinism were powerful social forces during this time and influenced the growth of the concept of Protestant work ethic. Protestants valued individuals who worked hard and believed good work ethic would be rewarded by God for doing God's will. Individuals living in poverty or poor were perceived as being disapproved of by God because they were lazy and had bad work ethic. (Carr 1996).

Jim Goad (1997) poses the idea that the American underclass's origins can be traced to slavery in colonial America. It is a common misconception that Africans are the only class of people forced into slavery in early American history. In the 1600s and 1700s, the earliest slaves brought to America were white Europeans (Deglar 1971). It is estimated that as many as half to two-thirds of white colonial immigrants arrived in colonial America as slaves in the form of indentured servants who signed contracts agreeing to unpaid labor for a set amount of time in exchange for transport to America. (Goad 1997).

There are different theories on when and who were the first groups of people labeled as "trash" in history. Author Newitz (1996) states that the earliest use of the term "white trash" may have been by black slaves referring to white slaves out of disdain for white servants. Goad (1997) also backs up this theory but poses the possibility that white convicts who were sold into slavery were the first group in America compared to trash. Other historians, like Wray (2006), trace modern white trash stereotypes to the late 1800s/early 1900s from studies conducted by the U.S. Eugenics Record Office (ERO). Between 1880 and 1920, the ERO conducted family eugenics studies to determine whether or not social traits deemed as negative (laziness, criminality, promiscuity, inbreeding, delinquency, etc.) were genetic. Eugenics played an influential role in shaping social policy and in shaping the perceptions society had towards poor white citizens (Wray 2006). In studies of family networks containing poor, rural whites, family relationships were traced back one to two generations with special notes of deviance (violations of social norms like incest, criminal behaviors, lack of education, and sexual deviance) found within family trees (Wray 2006). The goal was to demonstrate that large numbers of poor rural whites were genetically defective resulting in stereotypes being attached to underclass whites by attaching stereotypes of them having high rates of incestuous relationships, violent tendencies, laziness, lack of intelligence, and promiscuity (Newitz 1996).

According to Harkins (2003), the word "hillbilly" has different origins than the concept of "white trash" but the term's exact origins are also debatable. Harkins (2003) believed the term "hillbilly" is derived from the term "Billy Boy" in seventeenth-century Ireland. This term was given to the Scottish followers of King William III and may have

been brought to America by Scot-Irish immigrants. Regardless of the origins of the word, the definition of "hillbilly" evolved over the course of the 1900s as a sign of classism where people showed prejudices towards the low status social groups reflecting social, economic, and cultural changes to American society (Harkins 2003). Through the 1900s, the word hillbilly was an insult used by the middle class to belittle working-class southern whites (Harkins 2003). It reinforced social boundaries between those of higher social classes and lower social classes by symbolizing underclass whites using negative stereotypes and images (Harkins 2003).

The term hillbilly is often compared to racial slurs towards African Americans such as the term "nigger" (Goad 1997). In the 1900s, the white underclass was socially constructed as being the white "other" meaning that low-class whites were part of a struggle with racial identity and hierarchy similar to those struggles historically faced by other racial minority groups, particularly African Americans (Harkins 2003). With racism towards lower-class whites and members of nonwhite races, there have been historical perceptions of people within those groups being more primitive, less evolved, less intelligent, less capable, as lazy, and as violent in comparison to upper-class whites (Newitz 1996). Annalee Newitz writes, "when middle-class whites encounter lower-class whites, we find that often their class differences are represented as the difference between civilized folks and primitive ones. Lower class whites get racialized, and demeaned, because they fit into the primitive/civilized binary as primitives" (Newitz 1996:134).

In American history the word hillbilly is one of the few labels for the white underclass that is area specific and is applicable to geographic areas in the southern United States that are mountainous and hilly. Beech (2004) and Goad (1997) both cited

an issue of New York Journal from 1900 as using the word “hillbilly” for the first time in print. The article stated “A Hill-Billie is a free and untrammled white citizen of Alabama, who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as he pleases, drinks whiskey when he gets it, and fires off his revolver as the fancy takes him” (Beech 2004; Goad 1997; Green 1965). The word "white trash" is not area specific and is applicable to individuals living in any state in the United States that are considered poor whites or a member of the white underclass.

When analyzing the term “redneck,” historically the expression has been symbolic of low economic status and is based on the physical trait of white skin turning red from sunburn. Having a redneck was a characteristic of rural whites, specifically farmers, who were also members of the working class as in addition to farming, they were employed in blue-collar jobs. The exact origin of the word is not known, but it has had different meanings throughout history. In the 1920s and 1930s rednecks were members of unions in West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Indiana and were associated with being rebels and communists (Huber 1994). Another use of the word “redneck” may have emerged in Appalachia and other areas of the south as an equivalent to terms such as “cracker” and “hillbilly” (Huber 1994). A third possible use of the term may be from the usage of red handkerchiefs worn by organized miners around their necks to prevent coal dust from getting on their necks, down their shirts, and out of their nose and mouth (Huber 1994). Union coal miners adopted the name redneck because of their red bandannas as symbolic of their working-class identity and of the union movements (Huber 1994). Author Goad offers a modern definition of the concept

of a redneck and defines a redneck as someone aware and accepting of their low social status who purposely behaves in a norm-breaking way to go against societal norms.

"A redneck, as I define it, is someone both conscious of and comfortable with his designated role of cultural jerk. While hillbillies and white trash may act like idiots because they can't help it, a redneck does it to spite you... In the same way that stubborn mules are often able to make their owners look like asses, the redneck has the troublesome capacity to make ironic sport of the greater public's repulsion/ fascination with him" (Goad 1997:84).

Southern Stereotypes in the Media and Society

Southern stereotypes have existed in the media in many forms throughout American history. Advertisements, jokes, political music, comics, and television shows are all media outlets that use southern stereotypes as a way of highlighting class-consciousness. Numerous studies have been conducted on the usage of southern stereotypes in the media to detail how they have been used and the meanings behind how different sources portray hillbilly, redneck, and white trash stereotypes. In this section, the various studies that have been conducted will be summarized to explain ways past researchers have analyzed this area of entertainment and their findings (Davis 2010; Huber 1995; Schafft and Jackson 2010; Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012). Humor, inequality, changing definitions, and the social construction of southern culture will be discussed before a brief summary of findings in the literature.

Southern Stereotypes as Humor

In academic research, the genre of comedy has been a main focus of researchers. Historically, southern culture has been portrayed in television shows, movies, and more for the purpose of humor. In this section the genre of comedy will be discussed to understand how past researchers tie southern culture in the media to displays of humor.

In 2010, Catherine Evans Davis conducted a study of “You might be a redneck...” jokes commonly used in the media. According to Davis, these jokes are linked to the concept of poverty and the tendency of society to blame victims for their fate. By blaming the victim, poor southerners are blamed for their low social status and lack of social mobility by their own lack of work ethic and lack of dedication to change their lifestyles.

“The prototypical person in the category is poor, stupid, reckless, dirty, toothless, homophobic, alcoholic, addicted to tobacco in various forms, and violent. In addition to drunkenness...The WT [white trash] character is a bad parent, sees no particular value in education, and thinks that procreation should start at puberty (possibly through marrying close relatives). He lives in a trailer with a refrigerator on the front porch, drives a truck that is a heap of junk, plays pool (which may imply gambling), and is a NASCAR fan” (Davis 2010:195).

According to Davis all of these characteristics are associated in some way to poverty and that the upper classes use jokes about these attributes as a form of reassurance of social status and to reinforce what it means to be a member of higher social categories.

According to Huber (1995), comedians using southern stereotypes for jokes are usually middle-class white southerners and northerners. Because of comedians like Jeff

Foxworthy there has been a change in redneck humor into a small industry by making fun of lower class rural southerners. These jokes exaggerate characteristics of rural white southerners and portray them as outsiders by distinguishing and magnifying negative cultural aspects (Huber 1995).

Dominate culture views redneck humor "all in good fun" whereas any resistance to this type of humor comes from rural people, which is inconsequential because they make up the minority. Some protests have been successful though. In 2003 television network CBS produced a reality show called *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, which took rural people and housed them in Beverly Hills. Rural groups and politicians representing rural constituencies protested the show, and CBS canceled the project. Even though there are small victories for those protesting the use of rural images for humor, the media and rural images still dominate the airwaves (Schafft and Jackson 2010). Those who identify as southerners, blue-collar workers, rednecks, etc. may find humor about southerners offensive. Media representations of southern culture as comedic may attack individuals' who self-identify with southern or rural culture, which can be interpreted by individuals' as insulting, disrespectful, and degrading to those living in southern or rural culture.

The media also uses southern humor for capitalist reasons for the purpose of monetary gains. Southern-themed television shows, comedians, and movies are profitable and monetary gains are made in a wide variety of ways. Examples are ticket sales to movies and comedy shows, DVD or digital content sales, and profits from consumable products like t-shirts, posters, and home décor. Southern cultural images are taken and caricatured for other people's profits, and those who the comedy is modeled after have to accept others twisting their cultural image (Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012).

This dissertation seeks to differ from past research focusing on the role of humor in constructing redneck and hillbilly identity in the media. In past research, comedy and southern culture in the media are synonymous with researchers attributing the rise of southern stereotypes to the use of humor in portraying rednecks and hillbillies. From my research, a focal point missed by previous researchers is changes in television genres broadcasting southern culture as part of their plot. In the 2000s, docudramas and reality television shows dominated the genres airing southern themed television shows. There is a lack of research focusing on the role of the genres docudrama and reality television in past research and how this change in genres impacts redneck and hillbilly stereotypes in the 2000s. This dissertation will concentrate on southern themed docudramas and reality television shows to examine changes in the portrayal of redneck and hillbilly characters and culture.

Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement

This section will discuss classism, gender differences, racism, and findings past researchers have discussed about the topic of inequality. Historically, southerners in different media sources have been portrayed as outsiders who are of lower social status to mainstream society. It is important to understand the different ways researchers have examined inequality and its impacts on southern culture portrayed in different media outlets (Beech 2004; Schafft and Jackson 2010; Lang 2011; Albrecht 2008; Kendall 2011; Lester 2011).

Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Classism

Classism is defined as a set of beliefs or practices put into place by a culture that ranks people within a hierarchy where people have differing levels of equality determined by their rank in society (Thomas 2016). Southern stereotypes act as an agent of class reinforcement where those labeled as low-status are judged negatively by the higher social classes. The following studies discuss how classism is related to the use of southern culture negatively in the media.

Beech (2004) discusses how the popularity of comedians such as Jeff Foxworthy has turned the concept of being a redneck into a commodity and also reinforced classism through redneck humor.

“[R]edneck discourse [that] serves to obscure materialist processes of economic-restructuring that are producing class polarization in three ways. First, rural working-class whites are discursively constructed as obsolescent. Second, class status is understood and defined as lifestyle. Third, white racism is constructed as redneck racism” (Jarosz and Lawson 2002:10)

According to Beech, Foxworthy's jokes focus on themes such as lack of education and sophistication and deviant desires. Because of these themes, poor whites are portrayed as unsophisticated, outdated, and comedic. Mainstream media and its treatment of southern stereotypes have also had the tendency to displace racism onto poor, rural whites or "rednecks." Terms such as "redneck" and "hillbilly" are often applied to poor whites in the same way as racist terminology is used for nonwhite races and is used as a way to identify mainstream whites from whites who behave in ways that go against the social norms for whites (Beech 2004). "The mainstream consistently depicts the redneck not as

itself, but as a cultural weirdo. The redneck is the watched, not the watcher" (Goad 1997:76).

Being rural is often associated by mainstream society as equal to being backwards in comparison. This idea legitimizes public policies that are unfair to those in rural areas. Rural is defined as deficient in many ways, and those who do live in rural areas are sometimes limited in power because few people live in rural areas to fight unfair societal practices (Schafft and Jackson 2010).

Lang (2011) has researched country music and the power of language for those without social power or social/symbolic capital. Music has historically been used as a medium to distribute information and to express life's challenges and joys. Language is used in the process of producing a class culture and music is a way of constructing identity. Country music is used by working class people to construct identity including "redneck identity" (Lang 2011). Country music, along with other media outlets, can represent social class and can reinforce boundaries between different classes (Lang 2011). Albrect (2008) who has also researched music has analyzed lyrics by the band the Drive-By Truckers who are southern whites from working-class backgrounds who incorporate their status in their music. Albrect found that the Drive-By Truckers perform using a "redneck" identity. "The band isn't exploiting the stereotype; instead, they're calling attention to it and to the socioeconomic issues it often obscures" (Albrect 2008:2). The band presents their self-awareness of their social status and seek to separate themselves from the racist past associated with being a redneck or being southern. They use their lyrics to embrace redneck identity but also use their lyrics to redefine this

identity and separate it from the racism associated with redneck historical contexts (Albrect 2008).

Kendall (2011) has observed that television talk show personalities use terms like “white trash” and “trailer park trash” in differing ways. From her studies she has found comments about white trash are mainly limited to cable network channels, like Fox News, that communicate conservative viewpoints. Mainstream networks are more likely to use “trailer park” or “white trash” to describe people on reality shows and in sitcom storylines. Television commentators often report stories about individuals, describing them as “white trash” to reinforce ideas of low class/status. In 2008, Sarah Palin was referred to by commentators as white trash and as a redneck to hurt her image as she ran for vice president. Public opposition to public figures often use terminology such as “white trash” or “redneck” to demean hardworking people with limited financial resources or people seen as undesirable in social status (Kendall 2011). It is important to note, while the term “white trash” is used synonymously with the words redneck or hillbilly in the literature, in the proceeding chapters of this dissertation this term was not seen as applicable when discussing redneck and hillbillies in docudramas and reality television shows. As Kendall (2011) mentions, in the 2000s the term “white trash” is often used by news commentators to express conservative viewpoints. For this study, docudramas and reality television shows featuring redneck and hillbilly cultures were used but the term “white trash” was not mentioned within those shows. Therefore, it was seen as an important part of the historical discussion of past research on redneck and hillbilly culture since it is another term for both of those words but it is not relevant to the focus of the data analyzed for this study.

Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Gender Inequality

Differences in the portrayals of men and women in southern-themed media displays different stereotypes based on gender in relation to rednecks and hillbillies. It is important to discuss differences in gender representations to understand inequality existing within varying forms of media demonstrating stereotypical southern cultures. This section will explore studies conducted on gender inequality in southern-themed media and how men and women are portrayed differently (Hubbs 2010; Morris 2008; Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012).

In Nadine Hubbs 2010 article, “Redneck Woman and the Gendered Poetics of Class Rebellion,” she describes white working class male/female identity portrayed in the media and details portrayals of southern pride. By 1999, Jeff Foxworthy became a symbol of redneck pride. Foxworthy, along with several other comedians in the 2000s, progressed the commercialization of redneck culture and the concept of being proud of having qualities historically deemed as low class and undesirable. With this growth of redneck pride, media portrayals of southern stereotypes have been found to have significant differences in male/female redneck identity (Hubbs 2010). Most redneck identity in media outlets, such as Jeff Foxworthy's comedy routines, is portrayed using male figures as main characters and up until the mid-2000s women were depicted in most cases as the rednecks' wives or girlfriends. Hubbs (2010) points out a large gender gap in the portrayal of male and female redneck characters.

Edward Morris (2008) has also studied gender differences, not in the media, but in rural society. This research is important for this study when looking at the portrayal of

gender concerning hillbilly, redneck, and white trash media images. In rural society masculinity can be linked to young boys being impeded in school and to a sense of superiority being tied to males through acts of physical activity, risk, and power.

According to this study, males in rural societies occupy a higher social status but females receive less education and are less likely to participate in physical activities needed to reinforce masculine perceptions (Morris 2008). These concepts about masculinity, though not being applied to the media in Morris's study, may also be evident in media outlets portraying southern stereotypes, which historically portray men as more dominant characters and women in roles of less importance.

Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro (2012) discuss sexism within southern comedy. According to their research, comedy such as that from the Blue Collar Comedy Tour with Jeff Foxworthy, Bill Engvall, Larry the Cabel Guy, and Ron White present women as the butt of their jokes. Women are treated as annoying, focused on trivial affairs, irrational, incompetent, and unintelligent. Men are featured as intelligent, rational, patient, calm, skilled, and emotionally uninterested. Women are consistently insulted and masculinity is glorified (Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012).

According to Lester (2011), the term "redneck" is a gender-based term that focuses more on the southern man than woman. Lester quotes researcher Michael Graham about there being two types of southern women:

"If they're attractive and affluent, they're vapid, sorority-girl sellouts with big hair and bigger smiles, hanging off the arm of old money or nouveau riche manhood. If they're poor and pudgy, they're political prisoners of the trailer park

plantation, spending their days with Judge Judy and their nights with Miss Cleo. And either way, they're much too fond of Elvis" (Lester 2011:186)

Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Racial Inequality

Southern stereotypes and prejudices towards low-status white social groups have been compared to racial inequality by past researchers. This section will discuss both how rednecks and hillbillies are compared to minority groups and how southern characters are stereotyped as being racist and judgmental towards outsiders.

Carla Shirley (2010) is also a researcher who has detailed research on boundary management through the use of "You might be a redneck..." jokes. Shirley (2010) conducted interviews with southern whites in Mississippi to examine how individuals construct regional and racial identities in relation to other whites. She found in the media and in her interviews that a majority of sources perceive rednecks as being uneducated, as socially backward, and as racist. People who have little or no experience with southern culture are more likely to believe in these stereotypes. Shirley (2010) found similarities in how southern stereotypes and the perceptions of rednecks is comparable to race and how within white culture, upper classes use media stereotypes about the south to portray a negative cultural image to reinforce social boundaries for lower class whites in ways similar to the treatment of nonwhite minorities (Shirley 2010).

The terms "white trash," "hillbillies," and "rednecks" are applied to white people as a way to differentiate differences in power and privilege according to Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2003). Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2003) theorize that these terms set boundaries between inside and outside mainstream white society. It is through these

socially constructed terms that lower status whites are racialized and white privilege and power are maintained. Even though labeling underclass whites as "white trash" or some other category has similarities to racist labeling, white racial identity is not fully equitable to racist perceptions. Racial expressions applied to low-status whites is a way to objectify certain cultural aspects and to distinguish social positions that disrupt the homogenization of what is considered white cultural practices (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003).

Humor about southern or working class individuals often uses framing to create and reinforce negative images of these social groups and also portrays members of these groups as racist (Kendall 2011). Comedy about southerners, specifically that from the Blue Collar Comedy Tour, is often xenophobic and differences between themselves and racial minority groups is often the focus of jokes. Racism in their jokes is covert and subtle to the point where the jokes may not be understood as racist by those telling the jokes or seen as distasteful by consumers of the humor. The Blue Collar Comedy Tour also includes an African-American comedian, David Allen Greer, as their host. Because of their inclusion of a member of a minority group, there may exist tokenism where the inclusion of a minority member into group solidarity obscures the reality of the situation where racism exists (Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012).

Southern Stereotypes Redefined and Socially Constructed

This section will discuss changes in southern stereotypes over time and how they are socially constructed to demonstrate how humans and their interactions create society, and how the reality humans perceive is based on routine interactions that repeat over and over (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The use of words like rednecks and hillbillies, and the

attachment of symbols, behaviors, thoughts, and ideas to them construct how people perceive others in these roles. The historical use of southern stereotypes in the media concerning rednecks has been a powerful force in reinforcing class, race, and ethnic identities. Over time, poor southern whites, have historically responded to stereotypes and stigma attached to the southern white underclass by redefining the image and definition of what is considered a redneck. From the 1960s to 2000s in the media, a redneck is defined as hard-working blue-collar male. This redefining of the redneck identity has decreased the psychological impact of being within this social category and has been a strategy by underclass whites to resist and empower group members by transforming a cultural/racial slur into a badge of honor in terms of racial, class, and gender identity (Huber 1999).

According to Darling (2009), “redneck” is a socially constructed concept that often has little to do with the actual conditions of those being stereotyped and to actually understand what it means to be a “redneck,” researchers need to examine the different layers of socially constructed ideas attached to the white rural working class (Darling 2009). Jarosz and Lawson (2002) also discuss how the term "redneck" is abstract and even though originally being placed on poor Southern working-class rural whites, the term has expanded to a national level so that people outside of the south can have this label applied to them. Class differences and the creation of redneck identity is socially constructed and can be linked to agents that produce class differences, social relations, and power structures. Terms such as "redneck" and "white trash" reinforce class differences and associate these words with the idea of white poverty. According to Jarosz and Lawson (2002), jokes and stereotypes mask relationships between upper and lower

classes and the economic and political struggles that exist in the social construction of the discourse between the classes. For example, reinforcement of poor, white southern identity justifies classism and puts the blame of poverty on the poor themselves (Jarosz and Lawson 2002).

Even though historically terms such as "hillbilly" have had negative stereotypes attached to them, this has not always been the case and in the 2000s positive images are associated with these terms in an attempt to redefine them. For example, Rossman (2004) conducted research on country music and media ownership and found positive imagery associated with "hillbillies" in country music. According to Rossman terms such as "hillbilly," "country," "country-western," "folk," and "old-timey" have often been associated in country music with rural white America and American values of independence, patriotism, and religion (Rossman 2004).

One unique study by Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2003) redefines the term "hillbilly" in relation to music. According to their research, in modern society, the word "hillbilly" has been redefined in music and is commonly used positively in relation to country music. The word "hillbilly" was often used in the 1920s by record companies to describe music produced by whites in the rural and urban areas of the South. This was a similar practice comparable to major labels segregating jazz and blues recordings and showed the racialization of music marketing practices. "Hillbilly" was a racialized term applied to whites to distinguish musical practices that were distinct from mainstream musical practices and audiences (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003). In modern society the term "hillbilly" has grown in popularity and is commonly heard in music lyrics. Researchers Doane and Bonilla-Silva (2003) postulate that modern performers like Toby

Keith and Montgomery Gentry using the hillbilly stereotype appeals to whites who feel distanced from middle-class society or who are economically low status (Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003).

A Summary of Common Themes In Past Research

Numerous studies have been conducted in the area of southern stereotypes, and there are many themes that prevail when looking at the various research available. These themes include the use of southern stereotypes for humor, stereotypes as a means of inequality reinforcement, and how ideas behind southern stereotypes are socially constructed and have changing definitions over time.

When examining past research on the usage of southern stereotypes as humor several conclusions can be made. First, jokes about "rednecks," "hillbillies," and "white trash" are linked to poverty and low social status. These jokes tend to blame the victims for their own fate and low social status. Second, humor is a tool used by the upper classes to reinforce social boundaries. Those who use southern stereotypes for jokes are usually middle or upper-class members. Those in these higher social statuses tend to turn southern humor into a capitalistic industry. Third, those who are in the majority do not view southern jokes as harmful or offensive. Those who are members of those cultures being made fun of may find southern humor as insulting and may resent those using the humor. Fourth, Media representations about southern culture may be perceived as an attack on southern or rural identity, which is used for the purpose of higher status individuals' capitalistic endeavors for monetary gain.

Fifth, southern stereotypes are a way for those in positions of power to reinforce inequality in differing areas of society. The first way is through classism. Comedians like Jeff Foxworthy use the concept of being a redneck as a commodity, which reinforces classism. Jokes often focus on southerners' lack of education and deviant social behaviors. Being labeled as rural is also a way to legitimize unfair treatment to those in rural areas. Those labeled as rural are treated as being culturally backwards in comparison to mainstream society. Those who live in rural areas have less power and authority to fight discriminating social practices.

Different media outlets (music, television, movies, and comedy routines) display class differences in a variety of ways. In country music for example the language used can reinforce social boundaries between different classes. Music is a tool that can be used to produce a class culture and a way to construct identity. In television shows with commentators, like news programs, terms such as "white trash," "hillbilly," or "redneck" are used as tools to communicate points of view, usually negative. Using these terms in news programs reinforces ideas about low class and status and can be used by public opposition to public figures to demean those who they oppose.

The second way that inequality is reinforced is through the use of gendered and sexist imagery. Within southern humor there is an association with being "redneck" and masculinity. Being a redneck is often a masculine trait, and in most media outlets male figures make up most of the main characters who are redneck. Women on the other hand are more likely to be the redneck males' wives or girlfriends. Women in southern humor are treated as figures that are annoying, focused on trivial affairs, irrational, incompetent, and unintelligent. Males are placed in positions of power and made out to be capable,

intelligent, skilled, and rational. Women are insulted and men are praised and masculinity glorified. In studies focused on rural society, researchers have also found males in positions of power and higher status than women even though they receive less education on average and are more likely to participate in risky behaviors.

The third area of inequality reinforcement is through racist practices regarding underclass whites. Low-status whites are often racialized in the same way as minorities and perceptions about rednecks is used by white upper classes to reinforce social boundaries in the same way as the reinforcement of boundaries for nonwhite minorities. Terms such as "white trash," "hillbillies," and "rednecks" are applied to white people as a way for upper classes to differentiate between different levels of white power and privilege. These terms set boundaries as to who and who is not included in mainstream white society to maintain levels of white privilege and power. Even though racist perceptions and the treatment of low-status whites is similar, the two are significantly different. Racial expressions are often applied to low status white to objectify cultural aspects to magnify distinctions about what is considered a white cultural practice and what behavior whites can participate in that disrupts homogeneity.

Those who use humor about southern cultures also portray southerners as being racist themselves. In comedy routines differences between southerners and racial minority groups is often a main focus of jokes. Southerners are stereotyped as being racist towards nonwhite minorities in all forms of media including television, comedy routines, and music.

Research pertaining to southern stereotypes also has a focus on how stereotypes are socially constructed and can change over time. Terms such as "redneck," "hillbilly,"

and "white trash" are abstract and even though originally having meanings pertaining to lower status individuals, often living in the south, these meanings have changed so that people on a national level can identify as members of these social categories. For example, in modern society the term "redneck" has been redefined. In modern society a redneck is considered to be a hard-working, blue-collar male. By redefining the term "redneck" the psychological impact of being in this social category is reduced and underclass whites can feel empowered by turning a slur into a badge of honor for their self and group identity. This high-status perception can also be seen with the term "hillbilly."

The term "white trash" is different from the terms "redneck" and "hillbilly" in how "white trash" is social constructed. "White trash" is considered a lower social status group when compared to those who identify as rednecks or hillbillies who may try to distance themselves from being labeled as white trash because of the negative connotations being associated with that group. Redneck and hillbilly identity is a group identity whereas white trash is a label applied to isolated people giving them a lower social status in comparison.

Because southern stereotypes are socially constructed the upper classes have used terms like "redneck," "hillbilly," and "white trash" as a way to associate concepts with white poverty. Jokes and stereotypes mask social relationships between the upper and lower classes and the reinforcement of the idea of poor, white southern identity justify classism and put the blame of poverty on the poor.

Gaps In the Literature

Overall, the research that has been conducted by past researchers has focused mainly on the negative aspects of southern stereotyping and has focused little on perceptions of pride and high self-esteem. The research that has been conducted focuses on the terms “redneck,” “hillbilly,” and “white trash” and negative stereotypes and meanings attached to these words. Past research on different forms of media has focused mainly on the genre of comedy and how southern culture has been used to amuse audiences for laughs.

This dissertation seeks to address the following topics. First, there is a lack of focus on southern culture in the media in genres outside of comedy. Comedy and the relationship of humor with southern portrayals in the media is a focus of past research. A focus of analysis is on the genres of reality television and docudramas to determine how redneck and hillbilly culture is portrayed to determine if differences exist compared to past findings seen in the literature. Secondly, from this study, society has evolved from the years 2000 to 2018 to promote powerful female characters, gender equality, equality between members of different racial categories, and women as being educated and hard working. The literature does not address these changes and still discusses women in traditional female roles, southern culture as racist, and how rednecks/hillbillies are uneducated and underachievers. The following will be addressed in relation to southern culture in reality television and docudramas: The use of powerful female characters, gender equality, rednecks and hillbillies with occupations and higher education, and racial equality. Third, this dissertation seeks to examine the framing and social construction of southern culture used in docudramas and reality television shows from

2010-2017 to determine if the rednecks and hillbilly stereotypes in television shows of the 2000s are socially constructed more positively than found in past research. The literature does not address recent changes in how these stereotypes are perceived.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL MODEL

Television shows play a role in stigmatization and influence how viewers might perceive southern characters like rednecks and hillbillies. Television shows about southern culture construct an identity for those labeled as rednecks and hillbillies. Both positive and negative stereotypes are attached to southern characters on television shows in a variety of ways. This chapter will discuss theoretical perspectives analyzing the social construction of southern stereotypes in the media. This chapter will also address how producers and directors of television shows stigmatizing southern culture develop characters displaying positive social identity.

Social constructionist theories focus on how individuals interact with one another in society through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols to communicate. This dissertation will apply social constructionist theories to discuss how southern stereotypes have changed over time from the 1960s to the 2000s with a focus on how the emergence of positive stereotypes that evolved in the 2000s. I will use work of Blake E. Ashforth and Glen E. Kreiner (1999) and the theories of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) to understand how redneck and hillbillies are socially constructed in television shows to determine if differences can be observed compared to past portrayals found in the literature.

Social Constructionist Theories of Southern Stereotypes

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) are the creators of the concept of the social construction of reality. As discussed in the literature review, southern stereotypes

have changed over time and are socially constructed. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), patterns of behavior exist in society and certain bodies of knowledge are accepted as “reality” when patterns become habitual and are seen over and over again through human interactions. In southern-themed television shows from the 1960s to the 2000s, actors portray images of redneck and hillbilly people, and to viewers, seeing patterned images over and over in the media, creates a body of knowledge of what it means to be a redneck or hillbilly which is accepted as reality. In the 1960s, southern culture was presented using the genre of comedy, displaying rednecks and hillbillies as humorous beings representing a low-status culture. Rednecks and hillbillies have historically represented a low-ranking culture in US society, and the use of comedy to portray these southern cultures contributes to the construction of rednecks and hillbillies as having negative attributes and stereotypes. This dissertation seeks to address changes in patterns from redneck and hillbilly television imagery from the 2000s that is positively constructed and differs from the body of knowledge existing in the past.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) discuss three phases in which reality is constructed. The first phase is externalization where humans create the social world through interactions and from patterns in culture over time. The second phase is objectivation where patterns in society become objective, because meanings are attached to behaviors and beliefs. Externalized products become reality within the social world because meanings are attached, and these meanings over time become stable and accepted as fact. The third phase is where norms and values become stable and are continually passed on from generation to generation (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), language is how objectivated messages

are transmitted from human to human over time. Television shows, like southern themed television shows, transmit information (for example, what it means to be a redneck or hillbilly) to viewers through verbal and non-verbal means. Symbols, speech, music, interactions, and behaviors all make up verbal and nonverbal ways television shows transmit messages. For this dissertation, both verbal and nonverbal messages were coded for analysis to understand what messages are transmitted to viewers about southern culture.

According to the work of Darling (2009), rednecks are socially constructed concepts and to understand the meaning of the term “redneck,” researchers have to examine the socially constructed ideas attached. Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro (2012) discuss how comedians discussing rednecks construct redneck identity by creating material with which viewers can relate. Based on this study, in southern-themed television shows from 2010-2017, characters transmit information conforming to societal norms making redneck and hillbilly characters relatable to audiences. For example, redneck and hillbilly characters were observed displaying traditional family values, patriotism, good morals, a good work ethic, pride in having an education, and as having Christian values. Southern culture is socially constructed in television shows to be relatable to viewers and constructs redneck identity positively using imagery that is conformist to mainstream societal values and traditions alongside non-conformist imagery making characters more positively portrayed when compared the past. I will further apply these theories to this dissertation in Chapter 6.

Dirty Workers and Positive Identity Construction

The work of Blake E. Ashforth and Glen E. Kreiner (1999) is the main theoretical framework that will be used to understand feelings of pride in low-status whites labeled as rednecks or hillbillies. Ashforth and Kreiner studied what they refer to as “dirty workers” who are essentially people working in jobs that are considered disgusting, undesirable, degrading, nasty, or perceived as tainted in some way by mainstream society. Dirty workers can occupy a wide variety of occupations but some of the examples Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) give are butchers, pest control specialists, janitors, funeral home directors, soldiers, sweatshop workers, and dentists. For someone to be labeled a “dirty worker,” according to Ashforth and Kreiner, an individual occupies a job that is physically seen as disgusting or is symbolically degrading to a person’s social status or goes against mainstream society’s norms (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:414-415). Individuals who occupy the position of performing dirty work are negatively stigmatized by society for performing the tasks assigned to their work. What Ashforth and Kreiner determined is even though “dirty workers” are stigmatized and looked down upon by society, individuals within these roles maintain a positive sense of self-identity and group solidarity, which goes against the stigmatization placed upon their work by society (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:413-414; Bouwmeester and Kok 2018; Britton et al. 2016; Dick 2005; Gandolfi 2009; Tracy and Scott 2003; Walsh and Gordon 2008).

Even though Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) studied workers, their research is also applicable to studying low-status white cultures in terms of socially constructing a positive sense of self-identity. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) studied workers of jobs considered low-status by mainstream society. “Dirty Workers” going through the

processes of stigmatization and in response constructing a positive identity socially has similarities to the processes of identity management redneck and hillbilly cultures display in the media. From media portrayals of rednecks and hillbillies, these cultures have historically been stigmatized in extremely negative and undesirable ways. Even though media consumers often perceive these cultures in negative ways, actual members of these cultures display a sense of positive self-identity and pride to their audience (Huber 1999). Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), though covering a different area of society through their research, provide tools that can be used to study individuals in low-status roles in numerous areas of society, including low-status white cultures such as rednecks and hillbillies.

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) make groups the focal point of their research because to them, groups of people within jobs labeled as dirty are stigmatized as a whole instead of individuals. Groups reinforce social boundaries and groups respond to stigmatization to form a group identity that is positive and gives members a sense of belonging and high self-esteem (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:417-418; Bouwmeester and Kok 2018; Britton et al. 2016; Dick 2005; Gandolfi 2009; Tracy and Scott 2003; Walsh and Gordon 2008). According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), the concept of “dirt” is socially constructed when society labels an occupation as dishonorable or disdainful in some way causing that occupation to be stigmatized with negative characteristics (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:416). Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), explain jobs considered “dirty” are not necessarily seen by mainstream society as inconsequential and in certain cases (funeral home directors and waste management jobs for example) are necessary for society to function. These jobs may be important to society but because of the types of

work required, negative labels and stigmatization are placed on “dirty work” occupations (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:415-416). An example would be the occupation of “firefighter” which is important in society but is labeled as dangerous and risky (Tracy and Scott 2003).

Low-status white groups such as rednecks, hillbillies, and white trash are socially constructed cultural groups who are members of the underclass (the poor and unemployed), the working class (have jobs but little to no wealth), or the lower-class (low socioeconomic status) (Carr 1996). Applying the theories of Berger and Luckmann (1966) to studies of southern stereotypes, what categorizes someone as a redneck or a hillbilly is a label that is defined by society. Who is defined as a member of these low-status white social groups is determined by society as a whole and also determined by the individual. Some people are categorized by society as low-status by economic status, by culture, or by actions within society. Individuals also define themselves as rednecks or hillbillies by mentally perceiving themselves as having attributes attached to these socially constructed social groups. According to Berger and Luckman (1966), patterns in behavior create a body of knowledge people pull from when constructing reality. When applying the social construction of reality approach to redneck and hillbilly culture, both social groups and individuals define through patterns of behavior why these cultures are low-status and stigmatized.

Low-status white groups also deal with the concept of being labeled as “dirty” but in a different way than dirty workers. Words such as redneck and hillbilly historically were comparable to racial slurs in the past and are related to the concept of purity within the white racial category (Shirley 2010; Goad 1997; Harkins 2003; Newitz 1996).

Mainstream whites often use characteristics including region, gender, and class to distinguish between white subgroups to rank certain forms of whiteness as more dominant and deserving of status and respect than other subgroups. This is considered intra-racial boundary work among whites which functions to maintain hegemony of whiteness by alienating “lesser whites” and forms of whiteness to keep whiteness “pure” and untainted maintaining superior standards and status (Shirley 2010). Based on past literature, the treatment of the words redneck, hillbilly, and white trash as comparable to racial slurs is a controversial topic. While this is considered controversial in the social sciences, some researchers take this approach in explaining the alienation and discrimination low-status white subgroups (like low-status southern cultures) experience in relation to higher status whites (Shirley 2010; Goad 1997; Harkins 2003; Newitz 1996).

Ashforth and Kreiner provide several propositions to explain how “dirty workers” maintain a sense of positive self-identity, that is also applicable to understanding how the underclass whites maintain their sense of positivity although being defined negatively with terms such as rednecks and hillbillies (1999:418-428):

“Proposition 1: The greater the salience of social perceptions of dirtiness to the dirty workers, the weaker the identification of dirty workers with their work role will be” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:418).

There is often an assumption because of the work performed by dirty workers, that individuals within these roles would struggle with self-esteem and with explaining attributes they have to give the appearance of high self-esteem related to their jobs. From Ashforth and Kreiner’s (1999) studies, this is not true and their research indicates that

this may not always be the case (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:419-420). In the below model (Figure 1) developed by Ashforth and Kreiner (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:418), they organized several propositions to explain how someone within a dirty job could maintain a sense of high self-esteem within a job stigmatized with negative labels by mainstream society. According to proposition 1, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) determined dirty job workgroups respond to stigmatization by developing strong cultures that reinforce feelings and ideas of positivity and high self-esteem for group members (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:419; Bouwmeester and Kok 2018; Britton et al. 2016; Dick 2005; Gandolfi 2009; Tracy and Scott 2003; Walsh and Gordon 2008). Workgroups sharing a common culture take outside criticisms to reinforce social cohesion between members creating a “psychological boundary” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:419) giving members a sense of social separation from outsiders to the group. Subcultures may form because of this feeling of separateness from others outside of the group and the formation of these subcultures may increase feelings of social distance from outside society strengthening the bonds of workgroup members (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:420). This model (Figure 1), though focused on workers, may also shed some light onto how to study low-status white cultures, like redneck and hillbilly cultures, and how members within these cultures might maintain high self-esteem and levels of pride while occupying low-status positions within society (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Chidaushe 2006).

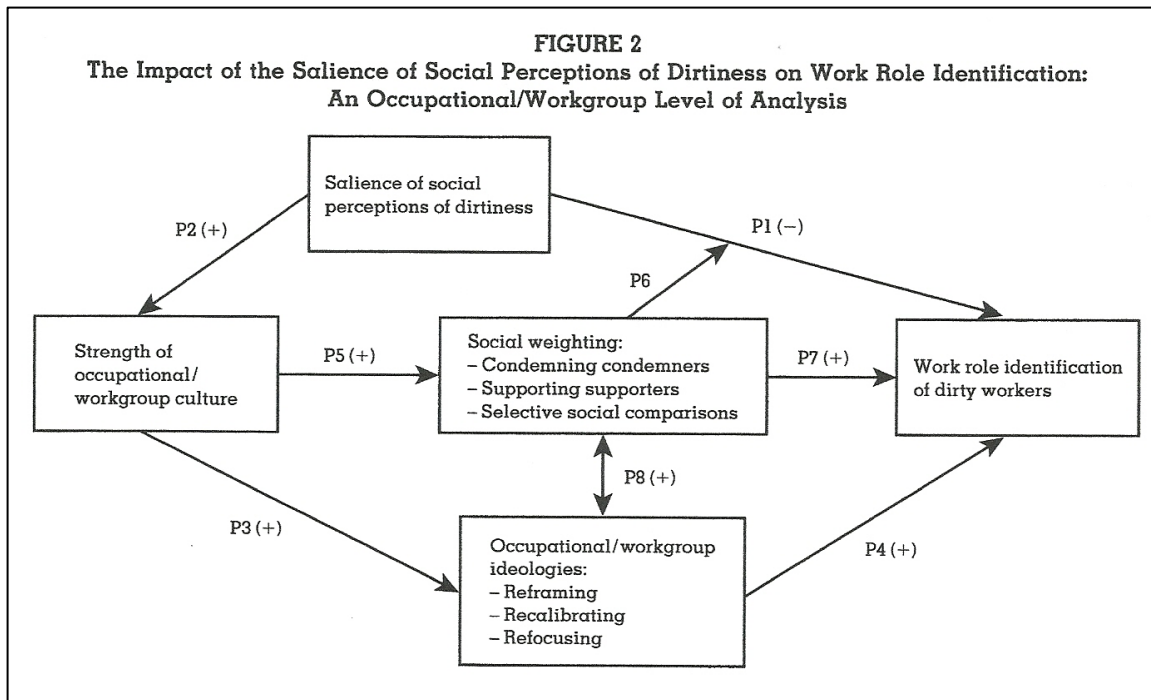


Figure 1. Ashford and Kreiner’s Figure 2 of The Impact of the Salience of Social Perceptions of Dirtiness on Work Role Identification: An Occupational/Workgroup Level of Analysis (Ashford and Kreiner, 1999:418)

“Proposition 2a: The greater the salience of social perceptions of dirtiness, the stronger the culture of the relevant occupation or workgroup will be” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:420).

“Proposition 2b: However, the culture of the relevant occupation or workgroup may be weakened to the extent that individuals are physically isolated, turnover is high, and the reward structure encourages competition between individuals” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:420).

Proposition 2a and Proposition 2b (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:418) developed by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) focus on workgroups and group culture within a workplace. According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), Proposition 2a revolves around the idea the greater the prominence of stigmatization about a specific dirty job, the more likely there will be a strong workgroup culture where members are cohesive due to the shared feelings of an outside threat (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:419). Walsh and Gordon (2008) state that employees within a workplace may be influenced by what they call a “work

identity,” which is a label developed by the workgroup that influences a worker to act, think, and behave in certain ways based on how their work identity makes them feel and think about themselves. Proposition 2b discusses how in some occupations workgroup culture is strengthened or weakened based on how close members of the group are depending on factors such as jobs with high levels of turnover with employees leaving and new employees arriving frequently hurting the chances of employees creating strong social bonds. Gandolfi (2009) supports this idea and further explains weak workplace bonds can cause individuals to have difficulties dealing with stigmatization and self-esteem. Workgroup culture can also be weakened when individual members experience feelings of being socially isolated or in jobs where members are competitively seeking rewards for their work (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:420; Chidaushe 2006; Gandolfi 2009; Walsh and Gordon 2008).

Within low-status white societies, a similar phenomenon may also be observed. Low-status whites who identify themselves as rednecks, hillbillies, or white trash also may respond to stigmatization through the creation of a shared group identity. Research indicates that jokes and humor about low-status whites reinforces classism and the gap between lower and upper classes (Davis 2010). Because of stigmatization, a reinforced social identity separating rednecks and hillbilly cultures from others forms within low-status white groups also creating an “us vs. them” mentality (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:419; Chidaushe 2006).

“Proposition 3: The stronger the culture of the dirty work occupation or work- group, the greater the use of ideological reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing will be” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:424).

“Proposition 4a: The greater the use of ideological reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing, the stronger the identification of dirty workers with their work role will be” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:424).

“Proposition 4b: Reframing will be most strongly associated with identification, followed by recalibrating and then refocusing” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:424).

From propositions 3, 4a, and 4b (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:424), Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) discuss how workers reorganize the image of their jobs to be framed positively using what they call “occupational ideologies” (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:421). Occupational ideologies are defined by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) as “systems of beliefs that provide a means for interpreting and understanding what the occupation does and why it matters” (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:421). The three occupational ideologies dirty workers use to reframe stigmatized jobs are reframing, recalibration, and refocusing and these are each processes where stigmatized workers transform negative attributes attached to their jobs into positive images giving them higher self-esteem (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:421-424; Chidaushe 2006; Dick 2005).

Reframing “involves transforming the meaning attached to a stigmatized occupation” (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:421) and according to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) this is done through the processes of infusing and neutralizing. Infusing is where stigmatized characteristics of a job are given positive attributes by the group making those characteristics a “badge of honor” to have and gives holders of those characteristics positive feelings about their job (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:421; Dick 2005).

Neutralizing is where any negative attributes attached to a job are nullified and made invalid (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:422; Dick 2005). According to Ashforth and Kreiner’s

research there are three methods of neutralizing. The first method of neutralizing is where workers say they are “simply doing their job” to take blame off them for the work that they do (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:422). Second, the process of “denial of injury” is where someone within a dirty work occupation denies their job does any type of harm to others. The third process is “denial of victim.” An example of both of these would be a car salesman selling an expensive car to someone who cannot afford the debt by relabeling their actions as helping someone find transportation to take care of their family and get to work (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:422; Chidaushe 2006). Penny Dick (2005) also supports the application of these three methods of neutralizing in her research stating that in dirty jobs, like police officers, participants in their jobs neutralize negative attributes in these same ways.

Recalibrating is a technique defined by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) as referring “to adjusting the implicit standards that are invoked to assess the magnitude...and/or valence...of a given dirty work attribute” (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:422). According to Britton et al. (2016), workers focus on positive aspects of their jobs to find self-esteem. Recalibrating is when workers manage negative attributes attached to their jobs and change their standards to make stigmatized job characteristics appear less important and smaller issues while taking positive attributes to give the appearance they are more important to focus on (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Britton et al. 2016).

Refocusing is where “the center of attention is shifted from stigmatized features of the work to the nonstigmatized features” (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:423). In other words, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) are saying that this is where workers try to refocus attention off negative images or aspects about their jobs and focus in on positive

characteristics in an attempt to make dirty jobs appear to have good qualities making the job positive for workers (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:423). For example, a career hunter might refocus their attention on how much money they earn to provide for their families giving them positive self-esteem from their occupation instead of on how their job kills animals for profit (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Chidaushe 2006; Britton et al. 2006; Peterson 2010).

If this same model were applied to low-status white cultures, similar ways of redefining societal positions may potentially be found. According to Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) concept of reframing, those who are stigmatized may transform negative labels into positive traits giving members of a group higher self-esteem (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:421). Bouwmeester and Kok (2018) discuss how individuals have coping mechanisms in place to combat morally dirty work tactics including reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing situations. Since individuals stigmatized as being rednecks and hillbillies are given negative labels by mainstream society, processes of reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing might occur within white, low-status social groups which result in perceptions of higher self-esteem and pride. For example, Huber (1999) stated that historically poor southerners have redefined the term "redneck" as a response to dealing with the stigmatization attached to the word. In modern society the term "redneck" has been redefined to be a hard-working, blue-collar individual as a way of lessening psychological impacts of being within this social category. By labeling a redneck as a hard-working, blue-collar laborer, the word is redefined into a badge of honor relating to racial, class, and gender identity (Huber 1999).

“Proposition 5: The stronger the culture of the dirty work occupation or work- group, the greater the use of social weighting will be (via differentiation of outsiders through condemning condemners and supporting supporters, and via selective social comparisons)” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:426).

“Proposition 6: Social weighting moderates the association between the salience of social perceptions of dirtiness and work role identification, such that the association is weakened by the use of social weighting” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:426).

“Proposition 7: Social weighting is directly and positively associated with work role identification (by focusing on favorable social referents and comparisons)” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:426).

In Proposition 5, Proposition, 6, and Proposition 7, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) discuss the topic of what they call “social weighting” (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:424). According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), the concept of dirtiness is a socially constructed concept created by outsiders to the group being stigmatized, and dirty workers must manage relationships with outsiders (family and friends for example) to make their work appear less unsavory and dirty using social weighting techniques (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:424).

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) detail three types of social weighting techniques. The first type is “condemning condemners” where outsiders to a worker’s occupation are labeled as negative in some way allowing workers to reject any harsh criticisms from outsiders stigmatizing them (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:424). The second type of social weighting is “supporting supporters” where outsiders who provide supportive views of a dirty worker’s job are respected, given higher levels of credibility, and help to boost that worker’s self-esteem (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:424-425). The last social weighting technique is “selective social comparisons” where workers in dirty jobs associate themselves with others who are similarly stigmatized which can help dirty workers gain self-esteem (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:424-425; Chidaushe 2006 Bouwmeester and Kok

2018; Britton et al. 2016; Dick 2005; Gandolfi 2009).

When analyzing low-status white social groups such as rednecks and hillbillies similar weighting techniques may also be used to moderate negative stereotypes in a way that makes them less important. Individuals within low-status white social groups may interact with individuals outside of their cultural group who may potentially believe in the stereotypes and stigmas attached to low-status white cultures. Because of these interactions, members of redneck and hillbilly labeled cultures may use weighting techniques in a similar fashion as dirty workers. Outsiders to redneck and hillbilly groups may be condemned to make outsiders opinions appear invalid. Supporters of redneck and hillbilly groups may be held in higher esteem and given support because they boost members' self-esteem. And lastly, members of redneck and hillbilly cultures may compare themselves with other stigmatized groups (minority groups or other low-socioeconomic status groups for example) (Huber 1999; Shirley2010).

“Proposition 8: There is a reciprocal, positive relationship between the use of the ideological techniques and social weighting” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:426).

According to Proposition 8, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) describe how both occupational ideologies and social weighting techniques work together to reinforce one another (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:426). In other words, workgroups socially construct positive imagery and attach it to jobs while also using relationships and views of outsiders to reinforce favorable characteristics of an occupation and to combat stigmatization (Bouwmeester and Kok 2018; Dick 2005; Tracy and Scott 2003). Because some workgroup cultures are strong, members of those groups may not interact with outsiders who stigmatize their positions, but members are aware of outsider judgments.

Outsiders to the group are not seen as credible in strong workgroup cultures where social weighting and occupational ideologies work together to rebuke outsider stigmas and stereotypes (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:426; Chidaushe 2006).

This same cycle may also be observed within white low-status groups. Rednecks and hillbillies may display characteristics to outsiders that are criticized, stigmatized, and stereotyped by those outsiders to the group. Outsider judgments reinforce mainstream society stereotypes about redneck and hillbilly cultures (Shirley 2010). Redneck and hillbilly groups may respond to outsiders in a similar way to dirty workers who use social weighting and occupational ideologies. Redneck and hillbilly group members might give outsiders less trust and acceptance if they are being condemned as a way to deal with negative stigmatization. Group members might be accepting of those supporting redneck and hillbilly culture because they gain self-esteem from their support. Redneck, hillbilly, and white trash cultural members may feel isolated from mainstream society because of the negative actions, behaviors, and judgments of outsiders who reinforce stereotypes (Shirley 2010; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003).

“Proposition 9: Given the negative association posited in Proposition 1 (between salience and identification) and the sequence of positive associations posited in Propositions 2-8 (involving culture, ideology, social weighting, and identification), most dirty workers will be somewhat ambivalent about their work role; specifically, at those times when social perceptions are acutely salient, work role identification will be lower (via Proposition 1), and when social perceptions are not acutely salient, identification will be higher (via Propositions 2-8)” ” (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:428).

In Proposition 9, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) focus on new members entering the occupation of a dirty job and the process of socialization they go through in terms of learning the job’s work culture. According to Ashforth and Kreiner, new workers to a job

go through a period of “sensemaking” where their perceptions about a job may change over time while working and socializing within their workplace (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:426). Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) discuss how newcomers may enter a job with preconceived notions influenced by mainstream stereotypes causing them to see their occupations in a negative light. Over time, as they socialize with their workgroup and learn the culture those beliefs may change and they form positive identities and develop higher self-esteem for their jobs (Ashford and Kreiner 1999:426-427; Chidaushe 2006).

A strong workgroup culture is important in reinforcing feelings of high self-esteem and positivity about a job. The weaker a workgroup culture is and the more a worker remains a member of outside society instead of adopting a workgroup culture, the more likely dirty workers will struggle with self-esteem and their perceptions about their jobs (Walsh and Gordon 2008). There is also a chance that a worker’s perception of their job may change depending on different social situations that may arise when they are working or when they are interacting with mainstream society (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999:427-428). For example, a factory worker will learn ideological and social weighting tools within their job to combat negative perceptions about the dirty and physically hard tasks workers perform. That same worker may struggle with feelings of shame when interacting with family members or friends who perceive their jobs as low paying and low-status, and pass negative judgments on their occupation choice (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Chidaushe 2006; Gadolfi 2009; Britton, Mercier, Buchbinder, and Bryant 2016).

This aspect of Ashforth and Kreiner’s (1999) model might be applicable in understanding how low-status whites create a cultural identity in response to

stigmatization. Based on findings in the literature review, rednecks and hillbillies in southern-themed television shows use elements of their culture to display feelings of positive self-esteem and pride using their community, family, masculinity, patriotism, education, cultural practices, and material possessions. Rednecks and hillbillies use elements of their culture to aid them in identifying as members of their social group and to reinforce the roles members of their culture are expected to maintain, influencing perceptions of high esteem and pride. At the same time, a redneck or hillbilly may feel shame if interacting with outsiders to their culture who pass harsh judgments and believe negative stereotypes about members of these low-status culture groups (Shirley 2010).

Applying the Theory of “Dirty Workers” To Southern Stereotypes

It is important to note that Ashforth and Kreiner’s (1999) theory was developed using studies and analysis that involved gathering data from individuals labeled as “dirty workers.” This dissertation differs from their study because it does not focus on the topic of workplaces. Instead, this study will use qualitative research to conduct a thematic analysis on television shows as its data source and will use a unique a coding scheme developed using Ashforth and Kreiner’s (1999) propositions. These propositions were used to form a coding scheme discussed further in Chapter 4 that is applicable to southern-themed television shows aired in the 2000s to understand how positive stereotypes have evolved, and differ from past stereotypes. Ashforth and Kreiner’s (1999) propositions have explanatory power in understanding rednecks and hillbillies who are similarly stigmatized like dirty workers and occupy a low-status position in society.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

To fully examine this subject, it is important to understand differences in television show portrayals of rednecks and hillbillies in the 2000s compared to past representations. It is also essential to examine how the depiction of these cultures in television shows in the 2000s expresses ideas of high self-esteem or pride. This research will examine different television shows aired in the 2000s depicting southern characters to determine what makes redneck/hillbilly characters of the 2000s appear as desirable and as reflecting high social status and high self-esteem.

While comedies' ties to southern characters in the media are well researched (Davis 2010; Huber 1995; Schafft and Jackson 2010; and Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012), the portrayal of the rednecks and hillbillies in the 2000s in the genres of reality television and docudramas is vague and under-researched in academia. The old definitions and negative stereotypes associated with the terms hillbilly and redneck are still prominent, but these terms have evolved over time as television has shifted southern culture in television shows from the realm of comedy to docudramas and reality television. Media representations of southern culture in the 2000s are highly influential in changing the definitions of what it means to be a redneck and hillbilly. It is important to define what a redneck or hillbilly in the 2000s is and what new stereotypes are attached to these labels.

For this dissertation, I pose two research questions. First, how do changes in stereotypes attached to rednecks and hillbillies display characters as prideful and having high self-esteem derived from southern cultural elements? Second, how do redneck and

hillbilly characters from the 2000s display traits conforming to mainstream societal norms? Based on a literature review, redneck and hillbilly characters display traits that conform to mainstream societal norms and characters derive pride and high self-esteem through displays of wealth, education, heritage and ancestry, acceptance of social diversity, occupations, material possessions, patriotism, religion, strong female characters, and comparisons of redneck characters in positive ways to outsiders to their culture. This research seeks to examine these traits and apply a theoretical model to understand how high self-esteem and pride are displayed in media representations of rednecks/hillbillies in the 2000s.

Methodology

For this research, a thematic analysis using theory-driven coding was chosen as an appropriate methodology to examine media depictions of redneck and hillbilly characters and imagery, sounds, music, speech, and any other qualitative content found while researching the subject of stereotypes in redneck/hillbilly themed television shows from the 2000s. Thematic analysis allows researchers to determine common ideas while giving researchers flexibility in the tools they use. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis “is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2012:57).

According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016), a “theme” is defined as a topic that can be used by researchers to organize repeating ideas found within a study. The first step in developing themes for this study was an analysis of the available literature on rednecks and hillbillies in the media. The literature review was assessed to see if patterns existed in

topics researchers discussed in past studies that could be sources of pride or self-esteem for southern characters. These patterns were used to develop themes and data collected was imposed on themes in the theory. The following themes were developed based on a review of the literature: traditional stereotypes, religion, education, occupation, specialized educational skills, patriotism, females in nontraditional roles, wealth/material possessions, diversity, outside cultures, and ancestry/family.

Alhojailan (2012) states that thematic analysis is used to identify themes before collecting data and/or after data is collected. For this study, once a set of themes was developed, subthemes were formed to define what content within the television shows might signify the presence of a theme (see Table 2 for a full listing of all themes and subthemes). These subthemes were first developed using the literature review and later refined once data had been collected to ensure all themes and subthemes were relevant and applicable to this study.

The coding scheme was further developed using common themes displayed by redneck/hillbilly characters in the media to apply a theoretical model developed by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) to understand how high self-esteem and feelings of pride are derived from southern culture portrayed in television shows. Elements from Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) work used in coding were social weighting concepts (condemning condemners, supporting supporters, and selective social comparisons), and building and using ideology such as reframing (reconstructing meanings attached to social statuses by infusing and neutralizing), recalibrating, and refocusing.

Population and Sample

The population for this study included television shows categorized in the genres of reality television and docudramas. Docudrama is a genre of media where dramatized re-enactments of actual events are featured, and the focus is on portraying actual events rather than fictional, unscripted situations ("What is Reality Television?" 2016). Reality television is a genre of media that is defined as filming unscripted events of real-life situations revolving around individuals who are not professional actors (Cambridge Dictionary 2018). Sources outside of reality television/docudramas were not included because they are all based on entirely fictional scripts and scenarios. The genres used for analysis were chosen because they are considered more representative of actual southern culture and because they focus on real events in comparison to fiction based sources, which play up stigmatized stereotypes and are a caricature of southern culture for the purpose of comedy.

Television shows chosen for the sample have a central theme revolving around low-class southern culture. They were chosen for specifically labeling individuals as rednecks and/or hillbillies, or because they featured a low-class, southern white culture comparable to redneck/hillbilly culture (rural Cajun culture for example). Only media aired between the years 2010 through 2017 were used in the analysis. Twelve reality television and docudramas about southern underclass culture were chosen from that time frame.

A convenience sample (Lune and Berg 2017) was taken for the following reasons. Many television shows in the pool of 643 potential episodes that could be analyzed are hard to access and/or are no longer available through viewable sources (online, DVD,

live, or streaming). A convenience sample was seen as appropriate given that many of the television shows are no longer accessible through any source and episodes had to be obtained based on availability to access (Lune and Berg 2017). Available shows/episodes used in the sample were obtained from online websites, television broadcasts, and through purchases on streaming websites.

Twelve television shows airing between the years 2010 and 2017 were chosen based on being categorized as reality television or docudramas featuring southern culture or redneck/hillbilly themes. These 12 television shows have a total of 643 episodes. Out of 643 episodes, 206 episodes were accessible for this study. A sample of 110 episodes was taken from the 206 available episodes to use for analysis in this study.

Table 1: Television Shows Included, Number of Seasons and Total Episodes Filmed, and Total Analyzed For This Study

Television Show Title	Year	Genre	Seasons	Total # Filmed Episodes	# Analyzed
Bayou Billionaires	2012-2013	Reality TV	2	22	11
Duck Dynasty	2012-2017	Reality TV	11	130	15
Hillbilly Blood	2012-2015	Docudrama	4	57	15
Hillbilly Handfishin	2011-2012	Reality TV	1	12	3
Moonshiners	2011-2017	Docudrama	6	83	10
My Big Redneck Wedding	2008-2011	Reality TV	4	41	11
R U Faster Than A Redneck	2011-2013	Reality TV	2	10	10
Redneck Island	2012-2017	Reality TV	5	46	1
Redneck Rehab	2012	Reality TV	1	7	2
My Redneck Vacation	2012-2013	Reality TV	3	42	11
Rocket City Rednecks	2011-2013	Docudrama	2	36	10
Swamp People	2010-2017	Docudrama	8	131	11
Total				643	110

Bayou Billionaires had two seasons but season one (containing eleven episodes) was chosen because it was the only one accessible through online streaming. Fifteen episodes of Duck Dynasty were recorded from live television broadcasts. Hillbilly Blood aired on live television and the complete seasons one and two (15 episodes) were included in the sample. Three episodes of Hillbilly Handfishin were accessible through

online streaming. Moonshiners aired 10 episodes on live television. My Big Redneck Wedding had four seasons available for purchase to stream online. Season one (11 episodes) was used in the sample because it was the most cost effective choice. R U Faster Than A Redneck had 10 episodes available to stream through free websites. Only one episode of Redneck Island was accessible through a free streaming website. Three episodes of Redneck Rehab were accessible through free streaming options. My Redneck Vacation had three seasons available for purchase to view online. Season one (11 episodes) was randomly selected for purchase by the principal researcher closing her eyes and choosing a random season. Rocket City Rednecks had two seasons available for purchase to view online. Season one (11 episodes) was randomly selected for purchase using the same technique as for My Big Redneck Wedding and all episodes from that season were included in the sample. Swamp People aired on live television and 20 episodes an hour in length from seasons four and five were recorded. A random sample of 11 episodes was chosen from the 20 episodes because other docudramas in the sample that were an hour long had 11 episodes in one season.

Data Collection and Coding

The data were collected by watching the television shows in the sample. Each episode was watched two times and detailed notes about images, text, music, quotes, dialog, language, and any other relevant qualitative data were recorded. During the first viewing, notes were taken detailing every scene within each television show describing what was happening, what characters were doing, their interactions, setting, music, speech, and dialog. The first viewing of each television show included a second

researcher viewing the same episodes. During the episodes, breaks were taken where the second researcher was asked their perspectives on what was seen in the episode to compare to the main researcher's notes. The second researcher included has a Masters Degree in Sociology and a Masters Degree in Appalachian Studies and is an expert in southern stereotypes. They participated in discussion only with the principal researcher during the first viewing. Notes about points they discussed when viewing the same episodes as the principal researcher, along with the main researcher conducting multiple viewings of the same 110 episodes was done to help address the reliability and validity of the main researcher's coding (Creswell 2012) to determine if a researcher outside of the project could interpret similar information from the same television episodes.

The second viewing of the 110 episodes in the sample took place several months after the first and the first set of detailed notes were evaluated to determine if anything needed to be added or removed or reevaluated. This second viewing aided in picking up extra details important for analysis and also focused on the occurrences of images or sounds associated with each theme and subtheme. Once the data were collected, all notes were organized based on the following themes for analysis: traditional stereotypes, religion, education, occupation, specialized educational skills, patriotism, females in nontraditional roles, wealth/material possessions, diversity, outside cultures, and ancestry/family. Data were also collected from online webpages for television shows discussing cast lists, producers, and relevant news about the television shows to find specific information about each show not easily seen while viewing episodes but was important in analysis.

Based on the literature review it was determined that the following elements play an important role in past research studying redneck/hillbilly media which became the themes coded in the data (See Appendix A): religion, education, patriotism, masculinity, femininity, occupation, wealth/material possessions, family/ancestors, and how characters interact with outsiders and other cultures. Based on these elements, every episode included in the sample was coded to determine how these elements related to individuals having pride or high self-esteem (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). A tally of the occurrence of themes and subthemes (Lune and Berg 2017; Fereday 2006) was done to determine in how many episodes themes and subthemes existed. Specific examples of themes and subthemes, images, quotes, and music were recorded for use to further explain or exemplify data that was coded.

Applying the Theoretical Model and Analysis

To understand and explain how and why different elements contained in the sample show pride and high self-esteem a coding scheme based on the work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) was developed (see Appendix B for the coding scheme). To examine elements of pride, each theme and subtheme were categorized using an Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) inspired coding scheme to determine how different cultural elements (religion, education, patriotism, masculinity, femininity, occupation, wealth/material possessions, family/ancestors, and interactions with outsiders) relate to southerners being portrayed in positive ways. Both manifest and latent functions were included in analysis. Manifest functions were described to determine what kinds of words/images coded

applied to each element of Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) theory. Latent functions were recorded to describe the kinds of meanings related to words/images coded.

The first element from Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) work included in analysis was social weighting techniques. The Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) concept of condemning condemners determined how outsiders to southern culture are condemned making them appear illegitimate as authority figures so their ideas are dismissed. Coded themes and subthemes were categorized as condemning condemners if outside cultures (city culture for example) were condemned, if any culture outside of the rural south was criticized or made fun of, and if southern or rural culture was promoted. Manifest functions coded included: a) southerners as workers; b) southerners as educated; c) as having close family ties; d) as connected to ancestral relations/history; e) as patriotic; f) as having Christian values; g) as having women in dominant roles; h) men in masculine roles. Latent functions of condemning condemners were southern characters criticizing or making fun of outside culture to be comedic, or southern culture being portrayed as containing positive elements better than outside cultures.

A second element for social weighting is supporting supporters. This is where outsiders to southern culture give credibility to southerners through shows of acceptance and support. This was seen when outsiders participated in redneck/hillbilly activities; interacted with redneck/hillbilly characters in positive ways; and outsiders supported the work of redneck/hillbilly characters. Manifest functions recorded were a) outsiders participating in redneck/hillbilly activities; b) outsiders interacting with redneck/hillbilly characters in positive ways; c) outsiders supporting the work of redneck/hillbilly characters. Latent functions were the inclusion of outsiders to episodes to legitimize

redneck/hillbilly behaviors and outsiders portrayed as supporting redneck/hillbilly characters in some way and appreciating the work or behaviors they displayed.

The last social weighting technique used is selective social comparisons where southerners compare themselves with outsiders who are similarly stigmatized which can be related to levels of self-esteem (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). Themes and subthemes were coded in this category if southerners selectively compared themselves to other social groups or favored comparisons to groups similarly stigmatized. Manifest functions coded were the presence of diverse cultures and characters included as part of the storyline, or when social groups were included of different but similarly stigmatized minority groups. Latent functions coded discuss how by including a diverse cast, rednecks/hillbillies attempt to display acceptance of a diverse world.

From the coded themes and subthemes, applicable information was categorized by social weighting techniques for analysis to discuss the presence of outsiders or outside cultures in the sample and how that impacted television show plot development, character interactions, social identity, self-esteem, and positive/negative portrayals of southern culture. Specific examples explaining the presence of social weighting techniques were also noted for use to support key findings in the data.

The next concept included in analysis derived from Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) theory is analyzing how media representations of southerners build and use ideology through reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing. Their concept of reframing was examined by reconstructing the meanings attached to southern cultures stigmatized negatively. This is done through a process of infusing (stigma being transformed into an honorable badge embedded with positive value) and through a process of neutralizing

(negative attributes are counteracted). Recalibrating looks at the maximization of redeeming qualities within a southern role. Refocusing determines how stigmatized features are focused on less and nonstigmatized features are focused on more (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999).

Coded themes and subthemes were categorized as reframing, recalibrating, and/or refocusing when relevant in the data. Reframing was done when meanings attached to southern cultures stigmatized negatively were infused where stigma was transformed into an honorable badge imbedded with positive value and neutralized where negative attributes were counteracted. For reframing, rednecks and hillbillies were infusing when they did not show shame in their culture and instead displayed love, pride, and high self-esteem while participating in stereotypical behaviors (manifest functions). For neutralizing, southern characters displayed positive images and behaviors (manifest functions) taking the focus off negative stereotypes to counteract them. Latent functions of infusing 'were rednecks/hillbillies taking images/behaviors seen by outsiders as negative and turning them into positives. Latent functions of neutralizing were the combining of negative stereotypes about rednecks/hillbillies with positive imagery to counteract negative images.

To recalibrate, coded themes had to focus on positive attributes of southern culture to show they maximized redeeming qualities (examples of manifest functions: focusing on education and women in nontraditional roles). Latent functions of this involved focusing on conforming to values of mainstream society to show southerners in positive ways.

Refocusing was applied to the coded themes when focus was not on stigmatized features but on nonstigmatized qualities (for example, episodes revolving around a character's occupation rather than the redneck behaviors they exhibited). Manifest functions included a focus on work, education, parties, accomplishing goals, and having fun rather than on stigmatized features. Latent functions were focuses on what redneck/hillbillies did and accomplished in episodes to focus viewers' attention to more positive imagery rather than negative stereotypes.

Once all coded themes and subthemes were categorized based on the coding scheme develop using Ashforth and Kreiner's theory (see coding scheme Appendix B), the data collected was analyzed to understand and discuss how positive imagery and self-esteem was found in the data set and to discuss the presence of traditional stereotypes in relation to findings in the literature review.

Limitations

For this study, only television shows in the genres of docudrama and reality television were used. Because of this, certain limitations will exist in the data collected. Other genres of media (fictional television genres, movies, comedians, comics/illustrations) are not included which may feature other data not incorporated in reality television/docudramas. Another limitation is focusing on data only found in media sources. Whether the data found in this study carries over to real southern society is unknown and future research will be needed to determine if individuals in real life identifying as rednecks or hillbillies relate to stereotypes from the 2000s of low-status

southern culture that exist in television shows in the docudrama and reality television genres.

There are also limitations to the theoretical frameworks used in analysis. The work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) was developed for qualitative analysis focusing on individuals and groups in the workplace. This dissertation uses qualitative research techniques and analysis focusing on individuals and groups portrayed in television shows which differs from Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) focus on dirty workers.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This dissertation sought to examine different southern cultural stereotypes found in reality television and docudramas featuring southern themes in the 2000s to determine how redneck/hillbilly characters portray positive images and exhibit high self-esteem or pride. In this chapter, the results of a thematic analysis will be discussed to examine whether or not southern-themed television shows in the 2000s exhibit positive attributes attached to redneck and hillbilly culture. A coding scheme was developed for this study using findings in the literature review to categorize different themes that could be sources of high self-esteem or pride. Codes based on themes containing positive attributes of southern culture were religion, education, specialized educational skills, patriotism, masculinity, females in traditional and non-traditional roles, occupations, hard work, wealth/material possessions, diversity, the presence of outside cultures, and ancestry/family. For each theme, data were coded to count the existence of each theme in episodes of television shows in the sample. Codes for subcategories within each theme were developed to examine themes in greater detail. For each themed category and subcategory included in analysis, each television show episode was examined and coded to see how many episodes contained themes and subcategories. Qualitative information for each subcategory was collected to examine speech, images, text, music, and other qualitative elements found during analysis used to create redneck and hillbilly characters and culture in each television show and episode.

The following table lists the themes and the subcategories coded, and subcategory examples to detail how the data were coded. See Appendix A for an example of a coding chart based on this table used in analysis.

Table 2: part 1 Listing Themes Coded, Subcategories for Themes, and Meanings

Subcategories Coded	Examples
Theme: Traditional Stereotypes	
Characters behaving in comedic and outrageous ways	Jokes, humorous music, crude behavior, slap-stick comedy, acting ignorant, risky behaviors, or other comedic displays
Poor or members of the lower social classes	Living in trailers, living in homes indicating poverty, lacking money, clothes that have holes and are dirty
Displays of ignorance or a lack of education	Language indicating lack of education (regional dialects/language), acting ignorant
A focus on masculinity	Focus on men, men in dominant roles, traditional roles,
Women in traditional female roles	Women as wives/girlfriends and not rednecks or hillbillies, homemakers, mothers, caretakers, feminine mannerisms, feminine clothing
Rednecks and hillbillies dressing in stereotypical ways	Long beards, dirty/torn clothing, overalls, camouflage, baseball caps, and clothing associated with low socioeconomic status
Racism	Characters acting judgmentally towards other racial groups
Distain For Outsiders	Characters acting judgmentally towards outsiders to their culture, family, or group
Xenophobic	Characters acting judgmentally towards outsiders to American culture
Theme: Religion	
The presence of discussions about religious beliefs	Specifically stating religious beliefs
Symbols representative of Christianity	Crosses, churches, jewelry with religious symbols, priests, etc.
Storylines including Christian rituals or practices	Praying, attending church, participating in church activities
Theme: Education	
Characters with a college education	Characters state they have college education
Higher educational training for occupations/jobs	Characters with jobs requiring college education or specialized school training
Characters with use education to teach viewers	Television show is educational to viewers
Theme: Specialized Educational Skills	
Characters using skills obtained through training, heritage, or life experiences to use in occupations or pass onto younger generations	Moonshine production, hunting, weapon making, occupations, family businesses, culture specific life skills, etc. Special educational skills obtained not from schools but from heritage, life experiences, or unique training.
Theme: Occupation	
Characters working at a job, discussing their occupation, participating in hard work, owning a business, or earning money as an episode storyline.	Characters specifically stating their occupation title, participating in an occupation as part of the episode storyline, owners of businesses, exchanging services for money, specific mentions of how much money was earned for jobs completed

Table 2: Part 2 Listing Themes Coded, Subcategories for Themes, and Meanings

Theme: Patriotism	
Symbols of patriotism	Flags, historic locations, patriotic music
Discussions of pride in where characters lived	Characters expressing pride in their culture or country
Characters displaying pride in American history	Discussions of pride in American history
Theme: Females in nontraditional roles	
Dominant figures	Breadwinners, leaders, or as equals to men or dominance over men
Breadwinners	Women with jobs/occupations, women earning money, women with education or special skills to use in jobs
Women as rednecks and hillbillies	Women labeled as rednecks or hillbillies or fitting traditional stereotypes for rednecks and hillbillies
Theme: Wealth/Material Possessions	
Homes in middle or upper-class areas	Homes appearing to be in middle or upper-class neighborhoods, mansions, upscale housing
Own material possessions indicating monetary wealth	ATVs, weapons, jewelry, vehicles, home décor, toys, objects indicating monetary wealth
Mentions of wealth by characters	Specific mentions of wealth by characters
Characters specifying amounts of money earned for jobs	Characters sharing how much money they earn working at their jobs
Theme: Diversity	
Characters of non-white races	African American, Asian, American Indian, Hispanic, other
Characters of different sexual orientations	Gay, lesbian, other
Characters from different cultures	Characters from cultures outside of redneck or hillbilly cultures being displayed
Theme: Outside Cultures	
Include characters from cultures outside of redneck/hillbilly culture	Individuals from outside of the redneck or hillbilly group being focused on in an episode
Characters travel to outside cultures	Characters travel and interact with outside cultures
Theme: Ancestry/Family	
Presence of family relationships	A family dynamic is featured
Family traditions	Family traditions are featured or discussed
Discussions of family history or ancestors	Characters discuss family history or ancestors
Passing traits from generation to generation	The sharing of knowledge, skills, education, or belongings from generation to generation

For the purpose of comparison, traditional stereotypes found in past research were also coded to determine how rednecks and hillbillies were portrayed similarly to historical negative representations. Traditional stereotypes included comedic portrayals of characters or situations, characters behaving in comedic and outrageous ways, rednecks being poor or members of the lower social classes, displays of ignorance or a

lack of education, a focus on masculinity, women as girlfriends or wives of rednecks who are not rednecks themselves and who exhibit traditional female roles, rednecks and hillbillies dressing in stereotypical ways, racism, disdain for outsiders, and xenophobia.

To present the results of coded themes and subcategories, I will include both counts of the number of episodes in which the themes and subcategories were present. I will detail specific examples of themes and subcategories in select episodes where themes or subcategories were dominant images. I will also present qualitative data observed in shows in the sample such as specific images, dialect, music, text, and any qualities that could not be measured and require a description to understand.

The Theme of Traditional Stereotypes

It is important to know how redneck and hillbilly characters in docudramas and reality television shows from the 2000s reflect historical stereotypes used in past media. According to Catlin (2012), “it’s easier for TV producers to “build on preexisting stereotypes, so they don’t need to build characters. There’s the assumption there’s something about the character of these people that is already in a lot of viewers’ minds...” In other words, even though positive imagery and changes in how southerners are portrayed may exist in the sample for this study from the 2000s in southern-themed television shows, negative historical stereotypes are still prominent and reflect findings by past researchers because television producers use preexisting stereotypes familiar to audiences to create redneck and hillbilly themed television shows. This section will present findings on different ways traditional stereotypes existed in the sample.

Codes developed from themes found in the literature review representing traditional stereotypes included southern stereotypes as humor, classism, gender inequality, and racial inequality. The theme of traditional stereotypes was given the following subcategories: the presence of jokes about southern characters, inclusion in the television genre of comedy, the presence of outsiders making jokes about southern culture or redneck and hillbilly characters, and the presence of television show attributes reinforcing humor being exhibited by characters (examples: funny music, a narrator cracking jokes, written words on screen, and humorous introduction credits to a show). The subcategory of classism examined the presence of individuals from different social classes (lower, middle, upper, and working-class), comparisons of different social classes, jokes about social class, and themes focusing on class differences. The subcategory of gender inequality examined characters specifically comparing male and female abilities, the presence of men and women as rednecks and hillbillies in episodes, men in traditional roles (breadwinners, dominant, the focus of stories, as stereotypical rednecks and hillbillies), and women in traditional roles (homemakers, weak and helpless, as sex symbols, not rednecks or hillbillies but their wives or girlfriends). The subcategory of racism identified specific mentions of race by characters, the presence of negative views on nonwhite races, the presence of characters of non-white races, and negative behaviors or attitudes towards individuals of non-white races.

Because this section on traditional stereotypes is based on findings in the literature review, the results will be structured based on the same categories listed in the literature review chapter in the section of “Southern Stereotypes in the Media and Society (page 23).” Traditional stereotypes are categorized in the literature review in the

following categories: Southern Stereotypes as Humor, Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Classism, Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Gender Inequality, and Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Racial Inequality.

Table 3: Count of Traditional Stereotypes In Episodes In The Sample

Traditional Stereotypes	Number of Episodes
Comedic and behaving in humorous ways	110
Wild and crazy behaviors	110
Living in housing associated with a lower socioeconomic status and poverty	42
Xenophobic	10
Poor and living in poverty	110
Focused on men as rednecks or hillbillies; men displayed in masculine ways	110
Men behaving in risky or dangerous ways	110
Women are not rednecks or hillbillies but are the wives or mothers of rednecks or hillbillies	59
Ignorant; Backwoods; Uneducated	110
Dirty; Unkempt; Badly dressed; Hillbillies with long beards	110
Racist; Judgmental to members of other races	0
Dislike outsiders	83

Southern Stereotypes as Humor

In the sample of 110 episodes, humor was a dominant concept used to portray southern culture in six out of twelve television shows. All six of these shows were categorized as part of the reality television genre but are also considered comedy shows based on their continued use of humor in full episodes. Out of the remaining television shows, four were categorized as docudramas and two were reality television without a comedy focus. These six television shows contained some elements of humor but focused on documenting daily life and jobs of redneck or hillbilly characters.

Five out of six southern-themed television shows focusing on comedic elements designed to amuse audiences and to make them laugh were *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011), *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), and *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012); All aired on the CMT network. The sixth was *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013) airing on the Speed network. These six television shows played into redneck and hillbilly stereotypes and were at their core comedy shows as part of the reality television genre. All episodes revolved around redneck and hillbilly characters exhibiting traditional stereotypes and behaving in funny ways. Characters lived in trailers, dressed sloppily, ate squirrels or animals they killed from hunting, exhibited signs of being poor or were shown in occupations commonly associated with the working-class (taxidermists, mechanics, physical laborers). Characters were featured as having stereotypical redneck tastes. Examples were decorating with stuffed animals from hunting trips including deer heads; using camouflage for decorations, clothing, wallpaper, and wedding attire; and showing a preference for activities such as mudding with ATVs, hunting animals, and drinking beer over activities done by outside upper-class characters that were featured like wine tastings, dinners in fancy restaurants, and spending time in big cities.

Actor Tom Arnold was the narrator for *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), and *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012). He popped into scenes from every episode in the sample of these shows (24 episodes total) from time to time making jokes about the redneck characters and to emphasize their redneck qualities. He constantly put down redneck culture and

characters through jokes. “Winner gets to keep his fingers,” joked Tom Arnold in season four, episode eight of *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), about three redneck males playing with a mousetrap to see who could set the trap off without getting caught as a game for their wedding. Tom Arnold’s presence helped construct the image that redneck characters in the 2000s in reality television shows actually represent comedic southern stereotypes that have existed in the past.

According to Huber (1995), humor about southern characteristics exaggerates situations to portray rednecks and hillbillies as outsiders by magnifying negative stereotypes. *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011) and *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012) were both television shows pitting rednecks against members of upper-class society in humorous ways. In (Johnson 2011), a redneck family becomes rich after natural gas is discovered on their property, and they use their newfound wealth to interact with upper-class society. All episodes of this show had characters interact with upper-class society in comedic ways using exaggerated redneck stereotypes. For example, In *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011) season one, episode one, the family joins a country club to, “bring the country to the club” as they said jokingly. One character from the show tries to use their wealth to buy a pet tiger in season one, episode three. Another character camps out on the roof of his trailer, convinced he can make contact with aliens in season one, episode ten.

My Big Redneck Vacation (Iracleanos 2012) was also an attempt to reinvent *The Beverly Hillbillies* by following a redneck family, portrayed in low-status ways, with the last name of Clampet as they took a vacation to the Hamptons where they lived in an upper-class neighborhood and enjoyed a lifestyle associated with wealthy members of

society. In all episodes in the sample the redneck family is surrounded by upper-class society, and they play up traditional redneck stereotypes in all scenes of every episode. They insist on hunting squirrels, deer, and other animals for food. They throw a dinner party where neighbors are served frog legs and raccoon while joking they have never heard of upscale foods like couscous. The redneck family wears t-shirts and camouflage instead of fancier clothes to match individuals from Hampton's society. They speak in thick southern accents. Characters engage in risky activities like shooting bows and arrows in a residential area and by riding ATVs. In both *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011) and *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), redneck families were portrayed as outsiders whose redneck qualities were exaggerated putting a focus on negative redneck stereotypes.

Davies (2010), discussed how redneck stereotypes using humor display southerners as being stupid and dirty, as living in trailers, as being bad parents, and as being associated with poverty in how they live their lives. The sample supported Davies's (2010) findings in different ways. Beginning with the stereotype of southerners as being dirty, in all 12 television shows in the sample, redneck and hillbilly characters dressed either dirty or unkempt. Not all rednecks or hillbilly characters were dirty or unkempt but individual characters did fit this stereotype. Some redneck and hillbilly characters were portrayed as working-class individuals who were featuring doing physically hard labor outdoors and clothes worn while doing those jobs was simple (t-shirts, jeans, tank tops, sneakers, and baseball caps). Working outdoors, characters often got dirty in the process of doing jobs. The entire casts of *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), and *Hillbilly Blood*

(Miller 2013) representing characters associated with southern stereotypes were portrayed as working-class and featured unkempt and dirty redneck and hillbilly characters. In *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), all cast members are part of the upper-class due to their success running a family business but the male patriarchs of the family (three brothers, their father, and their uncle) dress in stereotypical ways associated with low-status society. They all have long beards often associated with the hillbilly stereotype. They wear camouflage shirts and pants and often look dirty or working-class based on appearance. In *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), all hillbilly characters work out in the woods getting dirty running moonshine stills. One character dresses in overalls without a shirt, and the rest dress in t-shirts, camouflage, and baseball caps. In *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), the hillbilly characters running the business of teaching tourists to catch catfish dress in t-shirts and shorts and are often dirty and wet from the work they do. Characters also get dirty and dress stereotypically in *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008) where redneck couples participate in wild activities such as riding ATVs through the mud, work in working-class jobs (mechanics, machine shops, and taxidermists for example), and wed in attire related to stereotypes (Goodwill wedding dresses, camouflage suits or wedding dresses, or wedding dresses altered to look trashy and low-class. In *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013), *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012), *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), and *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), redneck or hillbilly characters played into traditional stereotypes by dressing in stereotypical ways associated with being

low-status southerners (dirty looking clothes, Confederate flag garb, t-shirts or tank tops, camouflage, and baseball hats.)

Secondly, redneck and hillbilly characters lived in trailers (total of 22 episodes), low-class neighborhoods (total of 42 episodes, and had qualities associated with poverty or being poor (total of 110 episodes). In *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), cast member Rog Jones lives in a trailer (shown in all episodes in the theme song introduction) even though he is portrayed as extremely intelligent and spends his time at best friend and fellow cast member Travis Taylor's workshop in an upper-class neighborhood. *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), five episodes (season 1, episodes 1,2, 3, 5, and 7) contain characters living in either a trailer or RV. In these five episodes outside of the trailers are low-class neighborhoods, garbage littering the ground, lots of mud, and imagery associated with poverty or low-status. In *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013), characters working outside trailers are featured in two episodes. (season 1, episode 2 and season 2, episode 4). In *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), in the first episode (season 1, episode 1), a redneck couple pack for their vacation in their trailer where they raise chickens. They describe people in the Hamptons as "highfalutin people" because they think residents in upper-class society are rich and pretentious (*My Big Redneck Vacation* Iracleanos 2012). Characters were shown living in impoverished neighborhoods in *Hillbilly Blood* (all 15 episodes), *My Big Redneck Wedding* (all 11 episodes), *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012) (both episodes in the sample), *My Redneck Vacation* (one episode), *Rocket City Rednecks* (all 10 episodes in the sample), and *Swamp People* (three episodes in the sample). All episodes in the sample contained characters having attributes associated with poverty or being poor.

Parents in these shows reinforced redneck pride for their children and encouraged stereotypical redneck behaviors. For example, in *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), the parents of Kayla, who had left redneck society to become a famous dancer, forced her to return to her family to be rehabilitated into redneck culture (season 1, episode 3). Her redneck parents felt their culture was superior to the city culture Kayla adopted even though Kayla was more successful professionally by losing her redneck identity. In *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), the ten-year-old son of a redneck couple is praised by his mother for having killed a deer so young and is shown shooting a gun. Their 17-year-old daughter is also shown shooting a gun. In *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), Jeff and Lance, a father-son team, work together to build a moonshine still and Jeff is proud his son is part of a long history of family moonshining (season 6 episode 12). Davies (2010), mentioned how redneck stereotypes feature redneck parents as bad at parenting. Encouraging children to behave as stereotypical rednecks, to participate in illegal behaviors like moonshining, and to participate in risky behaviors like hunting and shooting guns in unconventional ways could be interpreted as bad parenting by viewers.

Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Classism

Beech (2004) discussed how redneck comedians like Jeff Foxworthy reinforce classism using humor. Beech explained how Foxworthy's jokes focus on lack of education and sophistication to make characters out to be uneducated and ignorant. Redneck comedians also portray rednecks as unsophisticated and as behaving deviantly

in their culture and actions. (Beech 2004 and Goad 1997). The use of traditional stereotypes and humor reinforced social class in the sample in several ways.

First, making rednecks and hillbillies out to appear unintelligent and unsophisticated and featuring them in contrast to people who were intelligent and sophisticated was commonly found in the sample. The use of stereotypical rednecks and hillbillies who behaved as silly, backwoods, and ignorant reinforces social class and the idea southern characters occupy a lower social class. In all episodes of *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), even though the redneck family operates a million dollar business, some of the men of the family behave as stereotypical hillbillies to appear as members of a lower social class and adhering to a culture passed on from their ancestors. In all episodes in the sample of *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), the main character of Willie is both a stereotypical hillbilly but also adopts upper-class culture, which the other hillbilly men joke about. For example, Willie uses a helicopter to travel to a meeting (season 1, episode 3), goes golfing (season 5, episode 2), hires an assistant (season 5, episode 2), and lives in a mansion featured in eight out of fifteen episodes.

Lang (2011) says that language produces a class culture by constructing an identity. In Lang's (2011) country music study, she said working-class people construct "redneck identity" using language. In the sample of 110 episodes, language was used to construct southern stereotypes. Dialects associated with southern cultures were featured in all 12 television shows in the sample. *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) featured nine main characters who were working-class individuals from Louisiana who had Cajun accents. "I'm gonna stay in the swamp. And probably when I pass away I'm gonna go

six feet under in the swamp” said one character named Willie (season 8 episode 4) (*Swamp People* (Peterson 2010). “I’ll never get no regular job or sit behind a desk,” said Willie (season 8, episode 4) (*Swamp People* (Peterson 2010). “Gators” was used instead of alligators in every episode. “Dammed,” “pissed off,” and censored curse words were used in five episodes. “Never use none,” was said about a character never using deodorant in season 5, episode 5. Language used in this series is often grammatically incorrect and used language that makes characters appear uneducated and unsophisticated to construct southern cultural identity.

In *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013), both main characters, Spencer and Eugene speak with Appalachian accents. Both Spencer and Eugene use educated language while discussing engineering and science so they appear intelligent while constructing a hillbilly image with their regional accents. In *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), the hillbilly men represent members of the upper-class but use low-class language and have southern accents constructing a low-status image. “Too many days in the subdivision...snake falls outta trees you go running,” said the character Si about Willie fearing a snake (season 1, episode 1). “Yuppy” is used six times to describe outsiders who are members of suburban culture (season 1, episode 1; season 4, episode 11; season 9, episode 1). “Gonna” is used instead of “going to” in seven out of fifteen episodes. “Franken scent” is used instead of “frankincense” by the character of Si (season 4, episode 11) who also makes fart jokes.

Bayou Billionaires (Johnson 2011), *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), and *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013) all featured

redneck characters with thick southern accents, speaking in low-status ways. The following are examples of this. In *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008) (season 4, episode 6), the redneck couple shared a story about meeting where the man had stomach problems and overflowed the woman's toilet on their first date but had a "happy ending." Each episode has men and women acting as rednecks and discussing their relationships using stories and examples making characters appear unsophisticated and unintelligent. "Why do I love thee?" is typed across the screen in each episode of *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008) to introduce scenes where characters tell their love stories. Love stories include women getting pregnant in high school (season 4, episode 1), one man losing a hand in military combat (season 4, episode 5), meeting in a bar and wanting to drive to their wedding in a John Deere tractor (season 4, episode 10), and narrator Tom Arnold using the term "redneck" repeatedly every time he speaks to reinforce that the people in the show are rednecks. *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012) and *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), were extremely similar in their use of language and their use of Tom Arnold as narrator. All redneck characters had stereotypical southern accents and spoke with bad grammar and language associated with a lack of education in all episodes. "Woopin," "getting spanked like a newborn," "stompin," "pretzel muncher," and numerous other insults were used by the redneck show host to describe foreign car drivers in *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013). Overall, language was a huge part of the construction of southern identity in all the episodes in the sample with characters using bad grammar, appearing uneducated, and as using language associated with low-status members of society who are unsophisticated.

Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Gender Inequality

Based on a review of the literature on southern stereotypes in the media, being a redneck or hillbilly is associated more with men than women. According to Lester (2011), “redneck” is a gender-based term that focuses more on men and masculinity than on women. *Duck Dynasty* and *Redneck Island* were examples of Lester’s (2011) research findings. In *Duck Dynasty*, wives were extremely different when compared to their husbands. While the television show featured a hillbilly family, the husbands and fathers of the family displayed stereotypical hillbilly qualities. The wives and daughters participated in some hillbilly activities with the husbands and fathers but overall did not represent hillbilly stereotypes. Wives were attractive, dressed in beautiful clothing, wore fancy jewelry, and behaved more femininely. The wife of hillbilly character, Willie, assisted him in running the family business of manufacturing duck calls. She was portrayed as extremely professional at her job, focused on getting work done, and dressed as if she were a member of upper-class. Willie was a stereotypical hillbilly who joked around, had a long beard, wore an American flag bandana everywhere including work, and participated in hillbilly hijinks with his siblings and father who also represented the hillbilly stereotype.

Redneck Island (Abrego and Austin 2012) also featured beautiful women who were not representative of redneck stereotypes. *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012) was a competition show where men and women competed against one another in challenges to win money. Women on this show were sexy, wore clothes that were tight and showed off their physical features, and were attractive. Other than self-identifying as

rednecks to compete on the show, women did not display stereotypical redneck qualities aside from having southern accents. Men did show some redneck stereotypes including excessive drinking of beer and a few males with thick southern accents.

In all episodes in the sample, traditional stereotypes about men and masculinity were present and were dominant images. According to Hubbs (2010), redneck identity is represented by men with women as rednecks' wives or girlfriends. Morris (2008) discussed how males are more likely to participate in physical activities to reinforce masculine perceptions. There were several examples of this. In *Rocket City Rednecks*, women were featured in two episodes in one short scene per episode. Women were the wives of the redneck males who were the main characters. In each scene, women were shown as attractive mothers taking care of their family while their husbands participated in the building of redneck devices using their backgrounds in science. In *Hillbilly Blood*, Spencer's wife appears in one episode (season 1, episode 2). She isn't portrayed as a hillbilly but as a mother of one baby who is also pregnant and helpless. Spencer spends the episode working to hunt game animals with a crossbow to provide food for the coming winter for his family.

Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro (2012) observed that in southern comedy, women are made fun of and treated as incompetent and unintelligent. Women being treated as the butt of jokes was found in several of the television shows in the sample. *Duck Dynasty* featured one episode where Willie had to teach his teenage daughter to drive. The daughter did not act like a hillbilly like her father, which is a traditional stereotypical female role. Willie spent every scene with her making fun of her driving and associated her bad driving skills with her being a woman. In *My Big Redneck*

Wedding, women were portrayed as rednecks who participated in representing redneck stereotypes and behaved as unintelligent, comedic, and unattractive. Women dressed sloppily, destroyed wedding dresses to “redneck” them up to include camouflage attributes, lived in trailers, and married men who were stereotypical rednecks. In *My Big Redneck Vacation*, women were willing to adopt and conform to upper-class culture in some ways. For example, women were willing to take lessons of how to behave properly in expensive restaurants. They learned how to use dinnerware, hold their napkins, and how to represent themselves at a sophisticated dinner. When the wives tried to teach their husbands these lessons, the men made belching noises, fart jokes, and made the situation into a joke (season 1, episode 1). Throughout the series, when women wanted to adopt upper-class culture (culture displayed by millionaire status society found in the Hamptons), men made jokes about the women’s efforts.

Southern Stereotypes as Inequality Reinforcement: Racial Inequality

According to the literature review, southern stereotypes portray rednecks and hillbillies as similar to stereotypes attached to minority groups. Southern stereotypes also portray rednecks and hillbillies as being racist towards minority groups (Shirley 2010; McCarter 2004; Doane and Bonilla-Silva 2003; Kendall 2011). In the sample of 110 episodes, racial diversity did exist and could be compared to southern characters in terms of stereotyping. Racism, however, was a topic not directly discussed except in one episode (*Swamp People* Season 8, Episode 5) in the sample.

In the 12 television shows included in this study, little racial diversity existed in episodes included in the sample. Only 28 out of 110 episodes included individuals of

non-white races. In these 28 episodes, 14 individuals in various shows were African American, one man in *Swamp People* was an American Indian from the Houma tribe, one man in 11 episodes of *Hillbilly Blood* identified as part Native American, one man in *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011) was Asian, and one episode of *My Big Redneck Wedding* featured a Cuban family. In 18 out of 28 episodes members of non-white races were main characters. In the other 10, members of non-white races were secondary characters who main characters interacted with but were not the main focus when on camera.

When it comes to comparing the negative stereotyping of redneck and hillbilly culture to the negative stereotyping of minorities, Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro (2012) explain how episodes in this sample may address the inclusion of non-white characters. According to Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro (2012), the inclusion of a member of a minority group may represent tokenism where the minority member creates a vision of group solidarity but obscures racism that exists in a culture. By including one or two minority characters in an episode, redneck and hillbilly characters could be compared to those minority groups and appear to be coexisting happily on a television show. In *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012), one African American female was categorized as a redneck and competed in competitions with white redneck cast members even though she did not portray stereotypical redneck traits. In *Swamp People*, one cast member appearing in two episodes was a Native American and a member of the Houma tribe. This show also featured one African American as a main cast member in one episode (season 8, episode 5) and a secondary African American cast member in one scene of another episode (season 5, episode 6). *Redneck Rehab* (season 1, episode 3)

featured an African American female who was a secondary character that was friends with the white, redneck female main character. The brief use of individuals from non-white races interacting positively and cohesively with white, southern characters could be interpreted as tokenism to give the illusion that the southern cultures portrayed are inclusive and racially diverse based on television show storylines.

Table 4: Comparing Traditional Stereotypes To Non-Traditional Stereotypes

Traditional Stereotypes	Non-Traditional Stereotypes
Comedic; Focus on characters behaving in humorous ways	Serious; Documenting real life; Informative
Violating societal norms	Conforming to societal norms
Living in trailer parks and low income housing	Living in nice homes and members of middle and upper-class society
Xenophobic	Patriotic
Poor and living in poverty	Christian beliefs, practices, and rituals
Focused on men as rednecks or hillbillies; men displayed in masculine ways	Show signs of having wealth and material possessions; working-class, middle-class, and upper-class members
Men behaving in risky or dangerous ways	Both men and women are rednecks/hillbillies; More equality between men and women
Women are not rednecks or hillbillies but are the wives or mothers of rednecks or hillbillies	Both men and women behaving in risky or dangerous ways
Ignorant; Backwoods; Uneducated	Strong, Dominant females
Dirty; Unkempt; Badly dressed; Hillbillies with long beards	College educated or valuing higher education
Racist	Have special skills obtained through training
Dislike outsiders	Accepting of diversity

Breaking Traditions: Going Against Historical Stereotypes

In this section, data collected was coded to determine how rednecks and hillbillies in reality television and docudrama television shows from the 2000s differed from traditional stereotypes organized by common themes. Data were organized based on the

themes of religion, college education, specialized skills, occupation, hard work, patriotism, traditional and non-traditional females, wealth and material possessions, family and ancestry, and diversity and the presence of outsiders.

The Theme of Religion

According to Rossman (2004) and observations from data collection for this study, Christianity is a cultural theme found in southern-themed media. Adherence to Christian practices is associated with American mainstream values and conformity. Religion was included as a theme for analysis because pride and positive attributes could be attached to individual southern characters or television shows demonstrating Christian values. The theme of religion was coded using the following criteria: characters verbally mentioning their religious beliefs, the appearance of Christian religious symbols, and storylines involving Christian rituals or practices.

Table 5: Religion: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Religion	Total Number of Episodes
Total Number of Episodes In Sample	37
Mentions of Religious Beliefs	17
Christian Symbols	37
Storylines Including Christian rituals or practices	19

Elements in the southern-themed television shows in the sample containing the portrayal of Christian religion were found in 37 out of 110 episodes (33.6%). Religious symbols (crosses, Bibles, churches, traditional Christian marriage ceremony elements, and preachers) were included in 37 episodes. Religious symbols in 20 out of 37 episodes appeared briefly in the background of an episode (examples: necklaces female characters

wore with Christian crosses, crosses hanging on the wall of houses, churches passed while driving, and cross tattoos.).

Christianity was a central theme in one television show, *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012) and featured one episode revolving around participation at church and a prayer the entire family participated in to end every episode (fifteen episodes total in the sample). Prayers included statements of protecting their family, good morals and virtues, and displayed the “redneck” family using positive imagery as a close family living wholesome lives together. Only one other show, *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), featured two prayer scenes to pray after visiting sites destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. In the 17 episodes featuring prayers, characters were portrayed positively and praying as a way to display unity between characters and to show them as having wholesome values. In two out of thirty-seven episodes, characters are seen in a church setting, participating in church activities.

In the 20 episodes where religious symbols appear briefly, symbols often appear when a character is talking directly at the camera where viewers can see the character sitting still in front of various background sceneries. In these scenes, viewers can easily see clothing, pictures on the walls, tattoos, and other individual attributes because the camera focuses in on characters from their waist or shoulders to their head. In other episodes, religious symbols may appear for only a second as characters pass by them in a car or walking.

The Theme of Education

According to a review of the literature, historically redneck/hillbilly characters are portrayed as uneducated, unintelligent, and as non-achievers (Goad 1997). According to Davies (2010), poor southern characters in the media “sees no particular value in education” (Davis 2010:195). Based on the data collected, modern southern television shows differ from past representations by including redneck and hillbilly characters who value education or obtain skills from specialized training (examples: forging knives, moonshining, and animal hunting as a career). These careers are associated with traditional stereotypes but differ from past representations by requiring specialized educational training. Including the theme of education could link characters and television shows to displays of pride and self-esteem differing from television shows in the 1960s associating southern characters with lacking education. To code the theme of education, characters had to mention educational attainments, use their education to teach viewers knowledge they have, or pass on specialized knowledge to younger generations of their family.

Table 6: Education: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Education	Total Number of Episodes
Total Number of Episodes In Sample	76
Mentions of Educational Attainments	29
Use of Education to Teach Audiences	25

Out of 110 episodes analyzed, 76 contained portrayals of redneck/hillbilly characters as having a college education or having special skills obtained through training, heritage, or experience in some way. Two out of fourteen television shows had a main theme revolving around redneck or hillbilly characters using a college education to

educate viewers about topics including engineering, math, and science using redneck/hillbilly stereotypes as a part of their teaching tools. In *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), the main character Travis Taylor self-labeled himself as a redneck even though he displays attributes connected with the upper social classes (lives in an upper-class neighborhood and has monetary and material wealth) and has a PhD in aerospace systems engineering. *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011) also features Taylor's father who worked for NASA on Apollo 11. *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2003), has a main character with a college degree in education and spent several years working as a junior high school teacher. Both *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011) and *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2003) are educational and feature the main characters solving a different problem in each episode using mathematics, engineering, science, and other technical skills. For example, In *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2003), they spend one episode building a sluice for gem mining. In this episode, charts displaying information about mountains and gem mining are used to explain different rocks and the science behind how they are mined. In *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), Travis Taylor and his team spend one episode building a bombproof device to protect a truck from an explosion using beer cans while relating the engineering and science to redneck culture.

Four out of fourteen television shows had redneck/hillbilly characters discussing college education as part of single episodes where a bigger storyline was taking place. One of these instances was in *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer, 2012) where the main character of Willie needed help running the family business and was asked to hire his wife's cousin as his assistant because he had a college degree in finance making him qualified to assist in tasks relating to finances and business structuring. Three

of these instances involved a father talking about a child who earned a college degree as an expression of pride of their achievement. In *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), the plot of the show revolves around displaying alligator hunters earning a living in the swamps of Louisiana. There were three mentions in different episodes by one father with one son who obtained a college degree. His son's degree and career as a professional draftsman in a corporate job were discussed both with pride and humor. While being praised for his educational obtainment, the son was also praised for choosing to continue the tradition of alligator hunting like his father. The son was also teased for working in an air-conditioned office with a secretary to help him with his work while his father and brother worked out in the hot sun doing physically hard labor catching alligators as a profession.

The Theme of Specialized Skills

Displaying education through skills earned from experience, heritage, or special training appeared to be a central focus of several shows from the sample. In *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), alligator hunting required skills earned through experience and special training. Fathers and mothers passed on their hunting skills to their children. Hunting is a traditional stereotype in which redneck and hillbilly characters participate. Television shows displaying the specialized skills needed to hunt showing how complex and dangerous the activity is deviates from traditional stereotypes. How to find alligators, how to catch and kill them, and how to practice safety while on the job were skills taught through specialized experiences and education not taught in mainstream schools. In a different hunting show, *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011) featured a business called Big Fish Adventures where clients from big cities were taken to rural

areas and taught how to catch catfish using their hands and feet instead of using fishing rods or tools. The main characters, who self-labeled themselves hillbillies, were experts in fishing from years of experience and practice and passed on their skills to tourists hiring them for the specialized knowledge. In *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2003), the main characters of Spencer and Eugene operate a business selling hand-crafted knives. Both learned their skills in knife making from their ancestors and from other survivalists. They use primitive techniques to build their knives and spend one episode building a water wheel to help them grind and smooth the knives using junkyard parts (bike parts and old house gutters). Throughout the episode both characters act as teachers to the audience to educate viewers about the science, math, and engineering used to build their waterwheel. In *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), characters practice the tradition of moonshining as a means of earning money. In all episodes included in the sample, how to moonshine was a skill passed on from generation to generations. Characters shared their knowledge of scientific processes and engineering used to build moonshine stills and manufacture moonshine. The practice of moonshining was expressed as a skill that bonds families together and continues family heritages.

Table 7: Specialized Educational Skills: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Specialized Educational Skills	Total Number of Episodes
Total Number of Episodes In Sample	83
Displaying Specialized Skills As Part of Occupations	83
Passing Specialized Skills To Younger Generations	35

The passing of special knowledge and skills from one generation to the next appeared in *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller

2013), *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), and *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010). These television shows featured strong family ties and relayed a message of importance for older characters to pass on their knowledge to younger generations or characters appreciating learning skills passed down from their ancestors. How to produce moonshine, education in engineering, how to hunt to earn money, and how to make weapons are all specialized skills passed on orally and through training from family member to family member.

The Theme of Occupation

Rednecks and hillbillies are associated with the working-class and blue-collar jobs (Hubbs 2010; Kendall 2011; Darling 2009; Lang 2011). Based on the data collected, because of their association with the working-class and blue-collar jobs, southern television shows may include occupations and hard work as part of episode storylines. Television shows in the sample were coded for occupations and hard work using the following criteria: redneck and hillbilly characters work at a job or discuss their occupation; characters participate in hard work; characters own a business; and characters earn money working as part of the episode plot.

Table 8: Occupation: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Occupation	Total Number Episodes
Total Number of Episodes In Sample	83
Characters Working At a Job	83
Characters Discussing Their Occupation	83
Participating In Hard Work	83
Characters Own A Business	73
Characters Earning Money As An Episode Storyline	47

A dominant theme observed in the data were characters as rednecks or hillbillies having a job or being hard workers. At times this theme was displayed through a characters having an occupation while at other times it was displayed through characters participating in physical labor throughout an episode. Eighty-three out of one hundred and ten episodes contained characters with an occupation or participating in hard work. Seventy-five percent of the episodes in the sample contained characters having some type of occupation. Ten out of twelve shows had mentions of characters' occupations. Six out of twelve shows displayed redneck/hillbilly characters' occupations as part of the central theme to the television show's plot. The other four shows either had a few episodes mentioning characters' occupations as part of the storyline or briefly dedicated a scene for a character to discuss his/her job.

For the six shows that had redneck/hillbilly occupations as a central theme, jobs characters worked in involved physical labor, special education (either college degrees or special training), sometimes dangerous working conditions, professionalism, attempts to complete goals, and characters striving to earn a living to provide for their families. Redneck/hillbilly characters in these six shows also were independent workers, ran their own businesses, and showed success in being entrepreneurs. Four of the six shows featured rednecks/hillbilly characters as working-class people who followed traditional stereotypes within their occupations (dressed in t-shirts, jeans, camouflage, and baseball hats to complete work outdoors that involved getting dirty, wet, sweaty, and was physically demanding at times). Two shows featured characters wearing both unprofessional attire (t-shirts, jeans, etc.) and professional attire (men in suits, dress shoes, women in dresses and jewelry, and professional racing gear).

In the four shows (9 episodes combined) that only made mention or briefly dedicated airtime to discussing a character's occupation, jobs and an emphasis on hard work were present. Jobs that were featured were attached to men, and male "rednecks" or "hillbillies" were featured in occupations that included taxidermists, a fruit vendor, a mechanic, owning a Tae Kwan Do school, a member of the military, two welders, an actor/director, and a dancer. Three out of the four shows that made mention or briefly dedicated scenes to a person's occupation, the jobs were working-class level jobs (mechanics, taxidermy, welding). The actor/director and dancer were people featured in *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012) and were labeled as former rednecks by their family members, but rejected their culture and moved away to bigger cities to pursue a higher class image by seeking out jobs that would earn them money, fame, and a better reputation.

The Theme of Patriotism

Based on information in the literature review, the theme of patriotism was included to determine if characters showed support for American culture as a way of showing positive southern cultural elements. According to Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro (2012), comedy about southerners is often xenophobic by having southern characters show patriotic support for society in the United States by using outsiders as the butt of jokes. Hubbs (2010), found that comedians like Jeff Foxworthy are symbols of redneck pride influencing a growth of southern pride in the media. Patriotism was coded by characters stating pride or love on one's country, by displays of the U.S. or

Confederate flag, and by characters having discussions of American history relating to ancestry.

It is important to note that in the 2000s, controversy over the use and meaning of the Confederate flag became a large topic of debate in US society. While some interpret the use of Confederate flags as a symbol of racism, others debate it is a symbol of southern pride. For the purpose of this dissertation, Confederate flags will be discussed as representing symbols of southern pride because southern-themed television shows in the 2000s did not discuss this debate, racism, or history in relation to the Confederate flag, and displayed the flag in relation to characters participating in their culture in prideful ways.

To show patriotism, episodes in the sample had to contain symbols or practices showing pride in a character's state of residence and country. Characters could show patriotism about living in the United States or patriotism about living in a southern culture in the United States. Episodes were coded as including patriotism if symbols of patriotism were present (U.S. or Confederate Flags), if a character discussed their pride in where they lived, and if characters discussed cultural history that contained pride in American history. Characters were also coded as showing patriotism for use of American-made products. Sixty-nine out of 110 episodes contained some symbol or display of patriotism for characters' country or state of residence.

Table 9: Patriotism: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Patriotism	Total Number Episodes
Total Number of Episodes In Sample	69
Patriotic Symbols	69
Discussions of Pride In Where A Character Lived	30
Consumption or Use of American Beers	23
Own or Use American Trucks	30

The Confederate Flag, American flag, and state flags for the southern states featured in episodes were present in twenty out of sixty-nine episodes featuring the theme of patriotism. *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012) featured a Confederate Flag in all fifteen episodes included in the sample and an American flag in three out of fifteen episodes. *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) featured the Louisiana state flag. *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011) central theme revolved around father and son “rednecks” who both worked for NASA and were proud of the work the father did for the American space program. The American flag, space suits worn by American astronauts, and a visit to an American space museum all showed patriotism to viewers.

Another display of patriotism included the sharing of cultural history living in the south by characters who consider this background information as important to their family over the generations. For example, the history of Appalachian culture in the United States was shared by older characters in *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011) to show the importance of moonshining culture in the early 1900s as part of their ancestry and their heritage. Thirty out of sixty-nine episodes contained the sharing of cultural history with viewers with emphasis on histories of families and areas of the southeastern United States where the characters reside.

Characters were often shown using material possessions made by companies in the United States. American-made beers, vehicles, and clothes were common in different shows from the sample. *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), and *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012) featured the consumption of beers produced by companies in the United States, people driving large Ford trucks which are made in America, and individuals wearing brands of clothes produced in the United States. Reality television shows often blur out product brand names as a way of legally protecting a television show from being sued by corporations manufacturing products or because producers want to avoid paying fees to use the brand names (Schlueter 2015). In the sample, beer cans sometimes had their labels hidden, but can colors and shape made it easy to decipher the brand and type of beer being consumed.

Bud Light, produced by the Budweiser Corporation, was the beer of choice in *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), and *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), with 23 episodes including Bud Light beer cans in episodes. “Good old southern pride,” was used to describe the act of drinking beer in season 4, episode 7 of *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008). Bud Light beer and empty cans were used for a wide variety of reasons. Beer was used to make wedding decorations, a mobile to put over a baby crib, to pour on guests at a wedding, to throw for fun, to put in a protein shake, to build a bombproof truck using beer cans for protection, and to bond friends and family members through the act of drinking together. Miller Light and Pabst were the

other brands of American beers featured in episodes. Miller Lite was given to a father in *My Redneck Wedding* as incentive to be a couple's preacher at their wedding. Pabst was consumed by redneck characters in *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008) in one episode. Drinking and expressing a love of beer is a traditional stereotype. Using beer as an expression of American and southern pride is how these television shows differ from past representations.

Fifty episodes in the sample featured trucks. Because brand names were hidden, only thirty-five were identifiable and were American-made trucks. Ten episodes of *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013) had American muscle cars racing foreign cars.

Table 10: Mentions of Religion, Education/Specialized Skills, Occupation, and Patriotism

Television Show	Religion	Education/Specialized Skills	Occupation	Patriotism
Bayou Billionaires	1	4	1	0
Duck Dynasty	15	15	15	15
Hillbilly Blood	0	15	15	0
Hillbilly Handfishin	0	3	3	0
Moonshiners	8	8	10	8
My Big Redneck Wedding	11	0	6	11
R U Faster Than A Redneck	0	10	10	10
Redneck Island	0	0	0	1
Redneck Rehab	0	0	2	2
My Redneck Vacation	0	0	0	11
Rocket City	0	10	10	10
Swamp People	2	11	11	2
Total	37	76	83	70

The Theme of Non-traditional Females

Based on past research, women in southern-themed media follow traditional female roles (examples: taking care of children, being homemakers, as having less power than men). According to Hubbs (2010), women are depicted as the wives or girlfriends of redneck characters but are not labeled as rednecks themselves. According to Lester

(2011), the word “redneck” focuses on men more than women. Women who are attractive with wealth are trophies to men, and if they are unattractive, they live in a trailer park and are more often connected with negative redneck stereotypes (Lester 2011). Based on the data collected, television shows in the 2000s support past research findings but also contain women in non-traditional female roles. According to my research women in southern-themed television shows in the 2000s have more gender equality than in the past and include women deviating from traditional female roles or have both traditional and non-traditional roles.

Women in television shows in the sample were coded as behaving in traditional or non-traditional ways.. Traditional actions included women being homemakers (taking care of children and the home), dressing in feminine ways, as having less dominance and authority than men, and as being the wives/girlfriends of redneck/hillbilly characters. Non-traditional actions included women participating in traditional male activities (examples: hunting, occupations, risky/dangerous behaviors, breadwinners), women identifying as hillbillies or rednecks, women participating in redneck-related activities (examples: building things out of beer cans or getting married wearing camouflage), women in roles of importance or dominance, and women treated as equals to men.

Data from analysis both supported findings from research examined in the literature review and determined the existence of non- stereotypical redneck/hillbilly characters. Women were coded as either following traditional stereotypes for females or having non-traditional roles. Traditional roles include women treated as secondary characters compared to men, as the butt of men’s jokes, as needing men to take care of them, as mothers and homemakers, as wives/girlfriends of rednecks and hillbillies, and as

incompetent at completing tasks seen as masculine. Non-traditional roles include women participating in activities dominated by men, as breadwinners, as dominant over males, and as having equal or higher status than male characters. Out of 110 episodes analyzed, 66 contained women following traditional stereotypes. Out of 110 episodes analyzed, 59 contained women in non-traditional roles. When counting the appearance of female characters, 23 out of 110 episodes contained no women and only featured male characters.

In the sample of 110 episodes of southern-themed television shows analyzed, 69 out of 110 episodes contained at least one female character. Fifty-eight out of 69 episodes featured women in the role of wives/mothers with only two episodes featuring women only briefly while the rest had women as part of the overall story. These two episodes featured women only briefly in one to two short scenes and in the role of wives or mothers and not as rednecks/hillbillies. *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Klassen 2013) is the only show out of twelve (10 episodes total) that contained no female characters. Ten out of twelve shows displayed female characters as dominant in the storylines and in both traditional and non-traditional roles. With the exception of *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), which had female employees, females were family members related to men in the show but were considered part of redneck/hillbilly culture and participated alongside men to advance the story being portrayed.

Six out of twelve shows included in the sample, featured women as workers with occupations working alongside men. In three shows, women engaged in risky and dangerous work or physically hard work to earn a living, and their health and safety was

at as much risk as male characters in the show. *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) featured a mother-daughter team who worked without any males around as hunters, killing alligators to earn a living. They used boats, weapons like guns, and heavy equipment to pull alligators they killed into their boat to transport to sell. In *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), the one female character found in the sample and her boyfriend were partners in a moonshine business. She was portrayed as innovative and a vital part of their moonshining business. In four episodes analyzed, she was in charge of coming up with new types of moonshine, helping to assemble moonshine stills, taking part in business exchanges, and working as hard as her male counterpart. *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011) featured women as leaders working with tourists who wanted to learn to catch catfish using only their hands. Female “hillbillies” in this show were leaders, trained in skills needed to hunt and catch fish without tools, and were role models for outsiders visiting their culture. The work the female “hillbillies” participated in was outdoors and requiring physical strength, getting wet and muddy, and being responsible to the safety and success of their groups learning to catfish.

In *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeier 2012), women were in positions of power helping to run a family business alongside their husbands. Women were non-traditional in having positions of power within a family business where they had authority and dominance over men by taking leading role to get work related tasks completed. Women also followed traditional stereotypes of women as wives and mothers. They dressed in fancy clothes that were feminine (dresses, pink, jewelry, etc.) and associated with being wealthy, in the upper social classes, and not fitting traditional stereotypes of women being rednecks. Women in these 15 episodes were portrayed more

as the wives and family members tied to redneck males. These data support the findings of Lester (2011), Slade, Givens-Carroll, Narro (2012), and Hubbs (2010) who all determined that wives were not necessarily labeled as rednecks but were part of television shows in the sample in the roles of wives/mothers and as the butt of jokes made by male characters. The wives in this show differed from traditional stereotypes in having a dominant part of storylines, as being important in their roles as workers helping to run a business, and as sometimes having dominance over the decisions their husbands made.

Table 11: Counts of Episodes With Women In Non-traditional and Traditional Roles

Television Show	Women	
	Non-traditional	Traditional
Bayou Billionaires	11	11
Duck Dynasty	15	15
Hillbilly Blood	0	2
Hillbilly Handfishin	3	0
Moonshiners	4	4
My Big Redneck Wedding	11	11
R U Faster Than A Redneck	0	0
Redneck Island	1	1
Redneck Rehab	2	2
My Redneck Vacation	11	11
Rocket City	0	6
Swamp People	1	3
Total	59	66

Agreeing with the findings of past research, redneck/hillbilly television shows are dominated by masculinity. All 110 episodes in the sample had a central focus on males being dominant redneck/hillbilly characters. Men or themes about stereotypically masculine concepts dominated storylines and imagery. Hunting, weapons, large trucks owned by men, dangerous or risky behaviors, clothing worn typically by males (camouflage, baseball caps), men as workers or breadwinners, men as heads of households, men as “idiot” or comedic characters, and males in positions of dominance over women were found in entire sample and supported findings in studies conducted by

past researchers. Male characters, according to the sample, are all rednecks/hillbillies in some way. They all display characteristics of the working or lower-class even when they are in positions of power, hold large amounts of wealth, and live in upper-class homes and neighborhoods. Male characters in the sample play into the role of using redneck/hillbilly culture to create a caricature of real life to separate rednecks/hillbillies from the rest of society by portraying them as outsiders and violating the norms of mainstream society.

Themes of Wealth and Material Possessions

Traditionally, redneck and hillbillies in the media have been associated with poverty, the lower social classes, and as having little wealth (Jarosz and Lawson 2002; Kendall 2011; Davies 2010). According to my observations, a number of southern-themed television shows revolve around characters that have occupations and wealth. Having wealth and the ability to afford material possessions deviates from past research stating rednecks and hillbillies are poor and associated with poverty. Based on my research rednecks and hillbillies of the 2000s may display signs of being members of the middle and upper classes (living in upscale homes/mansions and having material wealth) and high social status (business owners, billionaire economic status, etc.) giving southern characters positive attributes and high self-esteem. The theme of wealth and material possessions was coded using the following criteria: television shows had mention or display wealthy southern characters, the presence of expensive material possessions owned by characters (examples: large trucks, ATVs, mansions, jewelry, property, and

tools), and characters specifically stating how much money they earned for a completed job.

Table 12: Wealth: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Wealth and Material Possessions	Total Number of Episodes
Total Number of Episodes In Sample	107
Middle or Upper-class homes or neighborhoods	59
Own Material Possessions Indicating Wealth	107
Mentions of Wealth By Southern Characters	107
Characters Specifying Amounts Earns For Completed Jobs	26

In the sample of 110 episodes, 107 episodes contained displays of wealth and ownership of material possessions not traditionally associated with the lower social classes (examples: expensive jewelry, ATVs, luxury campers, fancy clothing, expensive home décor, the ability to travel on elaborate trips, tools, mansions, and a summer camp.). Only one show, *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), displayed no signs of having wealth or material possessions associated with higher social classes.

Rednecks and hillbillies with wealth were the main plorline for two out of twelve shows which featured southern characters who went from being low-status families to being rich and wealthy enough to be part of the upper-class. Both shows had consistent displays of upper-class society and wealth in the form of mansions, expensive purchases, and interactions with outsiders who were members of richer social classes (examples: country clubs, relators selling expensive properties, owners of nearby mansions/expensive homes, individuals selling luxurious and expensive items). *My Big Redneck Vacation's* (Iracleanos 2012) theme was a “redneck” family vacationing in a four-million dollar home in the Hamptons where they enjoyed mingling with members of

the upper-class while behaving in stereotypical redneck ways (hunting squirrels, wearing camouflage, behaving in uncultured ways, constructing things out of beer cans, etc.). In *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011), the family is described as a real life version of the Beverly Hillbillies who discovered their property sat on oil deposits earning them a fortune in revenue. Characters are members of the upper-class due to their wealth but they behave in stereotypical “redneck” ways.

Hillbilly Blood (Miller 2013) and *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) consistently mentioned how much money characters earned from the work they completed from their jobs. The theme of both shows revolved around working-class southerners working hard to earn a living to provide for their families. In the 26 episodes of these two shows, how much money characters earned for specific jobs completed was shared with viewers to display how much wealth hard work could earn the characters. For example, in *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), the mother-daughter team earned \$500 from one alligator. In another episode a father-son team earn \$78 for a six-foot long alligator. In each episode prices were announced based on the size and weight of alligators caught.

In the 107 episodes displaying wealth and material possessions, images associated with having money were present in some way. Sometimes it was through the possessions people owned. Going against the stereotype of rednecks/hillbillies living in trailer parks, most characters lived in nice homes. Two shows had characters living in mansions. Four shows had characters living in homes that appeared expensive and in middle to upper class neighborhoods. Four shows featured characters living in homes that were trailers or appeared to be in lower status neighborhoods.

Themes of Ancestry and Family

Family was a central theme in all of the television shows included in the sample and was coded by the following criteria: episodes had family members interacting as part of the plot, episodes contained mentions of ancestral relations, family members passed on knowledge from generation to generation, family members worked or played together. Ninety-four out of one hundred and ten episodes featured characters with some type of family relationship. Eleven of the shows displayed familial relationships between the main redneck/hillbilly characters. Traditions, family history, occupations, education/skills being passed on from ancestors to younger generations were a focus of five out of twelve shows. These shows featured families as the main cast focused on with storylines revolving around family relationships.

Table 13: Family/Ancestry: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Family/Ancestry	Total Number of Episodes
Presence of Family Relationships	94
Family Traditions	51
Family Histories and Ancestry	51
Passing of Knowledge From Generation to Generation	51

Four shows featuring family relationships were reality television shows, which tended to focus on comedic displays of redneck culture. Episodes from these shows displayed redneck or hillbilly families in comedic ways showing family relationships as enjoyable, wild, fun, happy, and as close-knit. For example, *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), featured redneck couples throwing elaborate redneck themed weddings with the help of friends and family members. Wild weddings and receptions included stereotypical redneck behaviors including using beer cans to make decorations,

riding ATVs through the mud, holding the events in low-status places like mud bogs, and buying wedding attire from thrift shops. In *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), redneck families convinced loved ones who no longer identified as rednecks and had left southern culture to return to be rehabilitated to remember their culture and reunite with their families. Rehabilitation involved characters spending time with their families doing what they label as traditional stereotypical redneck activities like wearing camouflage, hunting with bows and arrows, and going camping. The loved ones no longer identifying as redneck go against traditional stereotypes by leaving southern culture to pursue wealth and life in city cultures. In *My Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), a redneck family enjoys a vacation to the Hamptons where they interact with members of the upper-class while behaving as what they label as “rednecks.” This includes, bringing their pet chickens from their trailer in Louisiana, trying to buy possum at a butcher’s shop, shooting bows and arrows around their vacation property, riding ATV’s, bringing deer heads to mount on the wall, and drinking beer. In *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011), a redneck family spends time together in each episode interacting with members of the upper-class while behaving as members of redneck culture. Traditional redneck behaviors include a male wearing shirts with no sleeves, referring to one family member’s new teeth, characters dressing unkempt, and saying “yee-haw.” The family’s wealth was used to bond family members together and to help one another have fun and enjoy life.

Swamp People (Peterson 2010), *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011), and *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013), and *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011) were docudramas, and *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012) was a reality television show; all featured discussions about ancestors, family history, the importance of passing on traditions to

younger generations, passing on family morals and values in each, and the importance of family ties in each episode in the sample (51 episodes total). These five television shows featured family members or friends with strong social bonds who worked together in occupations or jobs where ancestral ties were important.

Table 14: Number of Episodes Featuring Wealth/Material Possessions, Ancestry/Family, Diversity, and Outsiders

Television Show	Wealth/Material Possessions	Ancestry/Family	Diversity	Outsiders
Bayou Billionaires	11	11	0	11
Duck Dynasty	15	15	2	5
Hillbilly Blood	15	15	0	12
Hillbilly Handfishin	0	3	3	3
Moonshiners	10	10	0	10
My Big Redneck Wedding	11	11	1	5
R U Faster Than A Redneck	10	0	0	10
Redneck Island	1	1	0	1
Redneck Rehab	2	2	2	2
My Redneck Vacation	11	11	5	11
Rocket City	10	4	0	4
Swamp People	11	11	3	4
Total	107	94	16	78

Themes of Diversity and the Presence of Outsiders

It is important to analyze the presence of outsiders and members of different racial groups and sexual orientation to see how redneck and hillbilly characters interact with outsiders to their culture. According to a review of past research, redneck and hillbilly characters in the media are sometimes portrayed as being racist towards racial minority groups (Shirley 2010). When examining redneck-themed comedy routines, jokes are often made targeting minorities that are subtly racist (Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012). According to the theories of Ashforth and Kriener (1999), outsiders to a group may be condemned to give credibility and support to a group, or white underclass members may compare themselves with other stigmatized groups to regulate self-esteem.

Table 15: Diversity and Outside Cultures: Counts of Subcategories

Theme of Diversity and Outside Cultures	Total Number of Episodes
Inclusion of Characters of Non-White Races	27
Inclusion of Characters of Different Sexual Orientations	6
Inclusion of Characters From Different Cultures	78

In the sample of 110 episodes, 33 contained individuals from a variety of minority groups (non-white races and sexual orientation) and 78 contained characters from various cultures outside of the redneck/hillbilly. Individuals who were racial minorities included 21 African American individuals, an American Indian from the Houma tribe, a man who is part white and part Native American, an Asian male, and a Cuban family. Outsiders to southern cultures included people the redneck or hillbilly characters interacted with: store workers, cops, church members, professionals in different occupations who could give assistance to redneck/hillbilly characters in reaching goals, and friends to family members.

Going against the stereotype of rednecks and hillbillies being racist or intolerant of minorities, the 27 episodes featuring minorities did not display racism towards people of different races or sexual orientations. Racism in the sample was examined for the existence of racial slurs, racist or judgmental attitudes, and discrimination. White and non-white individuals interacted positively with one another in all cases. One episode of *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) did address racism directly. In season 8, episode 5, a white, working-class male teamed with an African American male. The two men nicknamed themselves “Salt” and “Pepper.” The two take time to discuss race and how strong their friendship is regardless of skin color and how “Salt” feels that skin color doesn’t matter because his parents raised him not to care. Another team on one episode of

Swamp People (Peterson 2010) features a man who is a Houma American Indian teamed with a white, working-class male. The American Indian man discussed how it is a family tradition to hunt alligators and that he was taught hunting skills by his father. He and his partner are successful in working together and spend one episode protecting children by killing an alligator inhabiting a park. Another example was in *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013), where Spencer, the main character, said he was part Native American but identified as “hillbilly” in season 3, episode 3, and he and his partner Eugene worked together teaching survival skills and engineering using their skills as hillbillies in all episodes.

In the sample, six individuals were gay males. Two male partners were in *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), two male partners were in *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), and one gay male was in *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012). *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012) featured two gay male characters as part of the central storyline and one as a secondary character. Sexual orientation was not focused on. Instead, the focus was on redneck characters’ interactions with people who were labeled as outsiders to their culture. In the two episodes, gay male characters played a role in a “redneck intervention.” The plot to the episodes was that a family member exited redneck culture to live in outside city culture by adopting high-class status, and their families wanted to “rehabilitate” them and help them return to their original redneck culture. One of the two episodes had a female former “redneck” with a gay male friend and an African American female best friend who joined her in her families “redneck” rehab where they participated in redneck culture. The second episode featured a gay man who was a former “redneck” whose

family made him and his partner join their redneck rehabilitation process to help him see what a great culture and family he left to live in the city. There was no mention of their sexual orientation. The focus was on people being from an outside, city culture which to redneck characters was deemed as a less desirable culture. *My Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012) regularly featured a gay male real estate agent who at times gave comedic reactions to the redneck families antics and was portrayed as out of place but eventually accepting of redneck culture. His sexual orientation was not discussed, and the focus was on his status as an outside, city person.

In 78 episodes in the sample, characters were outsiders to the hillbilly or redneck culture focused on in episodes. A person was coded as an outsider if they were not part of the main cast and were not part of redneck or hillbilly culture. In some cases, outsiders briefly interacted with main, redneck or hillbilly characters. In other cases, outsiders appeared in multiple scenes or episodes as secondary characters.

The presence of outsiders served as a way of highlighting differences between cultures to magnify redneck and hillbilly attributes. Thirty-six percent of episodes included outsiders with whom rednecks and hillbillies interacted. For example, in all 12 episodes of *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013), the two hillbilly characters interact with outsiders. In most cases, interactions were positive with the hillbilly men helping outsiders or doing business with them to assist them in their goals of teaching survival and engineering skills to audiences using stereotypical hillbilly behaviors. For example, they trade an old jeep they found in the woods to an auto-body shop owner to earn money to take care of their family. Both hillbilly characters are respectful towards the auto-body shop owner who was an older man but professional in his business. They shake his hand

after they agree on a price. The hillbilly characters discuss how it is part of their culture to be respectful of others. (season 2, episode 4). In two instances, outsiders were portrayed in negative ways with Eugene stating he disliked outsiders because they cause problems and disrupt hillbilly life (season 2, episode 1 and season 2, episode 7). *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011) contained four outsiders who were professionals in their occupations and assisted the rednecks in conducting science experiments. *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) featured four outsiders (random individuals they met hunting alligators and the business owner who bought alligator meat). Even though only three episodes of *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), were used in analysis, the television show features outsiders in all episodes as part of the purpose of the show displaying outsiders learning to catch catfish using their bare hands as part of a hillbilly business owners gimmick to entertain tourists.

Though less dominant, some television shows in the sample included outsiders who were displayed negatively and treated with mistrust by redneck and hillbilly characters. *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), featured outsiders or discussions about outsiders in all 10 episodes where outsiders (police, random people traveling near hidden moonshine stills, moonshine buyers) were threats and dangerous for those illegally producing moonshine. In *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013) and *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), outsiders were also constructed negatively with *Hillbilly Blood* containing five instances and *Duck Dynasty* containing five instances of negative interactions with outsiders. In all 10 episodes of *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013), outsiders were portrayed negatively and as foreigners to redneck culture (people from outside of the United States and from non-redneck cultures).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

In many ways, the portrayals and stereotypes of rednecks and hillbillies in docudrama and reality television shows in the 2000s mirror what were found in past forms of mass media. The prevalence of southern characters as backwoods, undesirable, living in trailers and shacks in the woods, acting crudely, participating in behaviors associated with the lower social classes, and using regional dialects is still strong in the television shows analyzed from the 2000s for this study. Even though past stereotypes are still dominant in the make-up of docudramas and reality television shows featuring rednecks and hillbillies, it is important to note there are differences found when examining the topic of positive imagery and displays of high self-esteem and pride exhibited by characters in the shows in the sample. By applying a theoretical model designed using the work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) and social constructionist theories, an attempt to understand how producers and directors of television shows with southern characters construct an image that is both stereotypical and contains elements of pride and high-self esteem is possible.

In this chapter I will first discuss the social construction of traditional southern stereotypes. Second, I will apply the work of Ashforth and Kreiner to non-traditional stereotypes. Using a coding scheme developed using Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) theoretical model, social weighting and ideology building and usage was reconfigured to be applicable to southern culture portrayed in docudramas and reality television to understand how redneck and hillbilly characters display positive imagery. Concepts from Ashforth and Kreiner's theoretical work used in this study include the analysis of

condemning condemners, supporting supporters, selective social comparisons, reframing through infusing, reframing through neutralizing, recalibrating, and refocusing (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999).

The Social Construction of Traditional Southern Stereotypes

From the 1960s through the 2000s television producers have kept traditional redneck stereotypes alive because they are familiar to audiences (Bullard 2017). Producers assumed that audiences know what a redneck or hillbilly is based on traditional stereotypes that have dominated rural themed television shows since the 1960s when Jed Clampet moved his hillbilly family to Beverly Hills in *The Beverly Hillbillies* (Simon and Ransohoff 1962), Andy Griffith was sheriff of Mayberry in *The Andy Griffith Show* (Leonard and Thomas 1960), and audiences met Billie Jo, Bobbie Jo, and Betty Jo of Hooterville via the Cannonball Express in *Petticoat Junction* (Sommers and Stewart 1970). When designing and constructing rednecks and hillbillies in the 2000s, television producers built their shows based on preexisting stereotypes because southern stereotypes have continually been reinforced over time and that is what audiences expect to see in southern, rural-themed television shows (Catlin 2012).

In this study of redneck and hillbilly-themed docudramas and reality television shows containing a sample of 110 episodes, rednecks and hillbillies carried on the tradition of behaving in stereotypical ways. In 12 television shows and a total of 110 episodes, southern characters were constructed in traditional ways as poor, being members of the lower or working-class, living in trailers, dirty, badly dressed, ignorant, comedic, uncultured (lacking manners and education), male dominated, disliking

outsiders, and behaving in outlandish and crazy ways. Every show and every episode in the sample contained some element of traditional southern stereotypes to create redneck or hillbilly images.

Reality television and docudrama shows containing redneck and hillbilly themes were designed to document real-life situations that occur in these southern cultures. Combining docudramas or reality television with the stereotype that southern characters are amusing and funny creates both a traditional and non-traditional redneck or hillbilly character. Based on data collected, the southern characters of the 1960s were two-dimensional and existed to make jokes for audiences to laugh at with little depth or character building. In the 2000s, producers of reality television and docudramas attempted to create a more multi-dimensional southern character by documenting real life events to show rednecks and hillbillies in more complex ways. By documenting real life events, rednecks and hillbillies inform audiences about their culture in ways television shows from the 1960s lacked because they were focused more on simple jokes and quick laughs.

Six television shows in the sample were reality television shows that revolved around comedic portrayals of rednecks. *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011), *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012), and *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013) were both reality television shows and comedy shows. Redneck characters were constructed traditionally as unsophisticated, poor, uneducated, crude, dirty, as having a preference for eating squirrels and other forest animals, as loving American beers and trucks, and as disliking

outside cultures. To these reality television rednecks, southern culture, though portrayed as undesirable, was seen as superior to outside cultures by those living within redneck culture.

Bayou Billionaires (Johnson 2011), *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012), and *R U Faster Than A Redneck* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013) constructed redneck characters as unintelligent and unsophisticated. Each of these shows featured redneck characters behaving in outlandish ways for the purpose of shock and comedic value. Episodes featured redneck characters engaging in risky behaviors including racing cars, riding ATVs through mud and hills, drinking alcohol, shooting guns, using bows and arrows, playing with fire or fireworks, and using power tools. Risky behaviors such as these were found repeatedly in episodes featuring rednecks making them appear the norm in redneck culture. Characters were portrayed as loving meat from animals not typically consumed in mainstream society (squirrel, possum, raccoons, and frogs) making them appear uncultured, poor, and lacking education and manners.

Characters in all of the redneck-themed television shows in the sample self-identified as rednecks with pride because the term “redneck” was a reflection of their culture and their way of life. Redneck characters made jokes and spoke in thick southern accents while using language and sayings found in their culture. Outsiders often reacted to redneck and hillbilly characters with confusion, shock, amusement, or disdain, but redneck and hillbilly characters continued to behave in stereotypical ways, refusing to conform certain aspects of their culture to mainstream societal norms.

Outsiders sometimes existed to reinforce traditional stereotypes to increase comedic representations. The presence of actor Tom Arnold as the narrator for *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), and *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012) acted as an agent of reinforcement of traditional stereotypes. Even though the redneck characters behaved in wild and crazy ways, Tom Arnold appearing to narrate jokes about their behaviors further added comedic elements to the show. The use of a narrator who was an outsider to the southern cultures portrayed helped to reinforce traditional stereotypes to make redneck characters appear to be outsiders to mainstream society.

Humor about southern culture exaggerates situations, magnifying negative stereotypes and making redneck and hillbilly characters appear as outsiders (Huber 1995). The six reality television shows combining comedy into entire episodes were hyper-real, meaning they were “exaggerated in comparison to reality” (Oxford Dictionary 2019). These six television shows took redneck stereotypes and magnified them to put them as the forefront images for viewers to focus on. In the background, non-traditional stereotypes existed but did not get the emphasis and magnification of traditional stereotypes.

While traditional stereotypes still dominated the construction of redneck and hillbilly characters and culture, not all traditional stereotypes were present or dominating in the shows from the 2000’s. First, rednecks and hillbillies have historically been stereotyped as being racist and xenophobic. In this sample of southern-themed television shows from the 2000s, there were no displays of racism. No characters were constructed as judgmental towards individuals of non-white races. The television show *R U Faster*

Than A Redneck (Brutsman and Lassen 2013) had 10 episodes featuring xenophobic behaviors including foreign car drivers who were insulted and treated as inferior to redneck American car drivers. A total of 100 episodes had no characters exhibiting prejudice towards people from other countries.

A second difference was that rednecks and hillbillies were commonly constructed as being members of higher social classes (examples were rednecks with billionaire socioeconomic statuses, business owners, and rednecks with high status jobs like NASA scientists). Out of 110 episodes, only 42 featured individuals living in trailers or housing found in impoverished areas. Traditional stereotypes commonly feature rednecks and hillbillies as poor and living in poverty. In 68 episodes in the sample, rednecks and hillbillies lived either middle or upper-class lifestyles with upscale homes and in some cases mansions.

A third way this sample broke traditions was featuring women in non-traditional roles. Past research stated that women in traditional stereotypes were wives or girlfriends of rednecks and hillbillies but not rednecks or hillbillies themselves. In this study, 59 out of 110 episodes featured women upholding traditional stereotypes about women. Non-traditional stereotypes were found in 51 episodes where women were self-labeled as rednecks or hillbillies, were breadwinners, and dominant figures in storylines.

Rednecks and Hillbillies: Breaking From Traditional Stereotypes to Construct A More Complex Character

Based on this study, producers and directors of shows featuring southern characters continue to construct traditional images of stereotypical rednecks and hillbillies. However, television shows in the 2000s contain commonalities that depart

from the traditional stereotypes and contain positive imagery constructing a more complex character. In other words, the presence of characters who express dedication to ancestral traditions, have education or special skills obtained through training, are patriotic, express dedication to their religious beliefs in Christianity, are hard workers, have occupations, show more equality between men and women and with minorities, and have wealth exemplify there is now more to redneck and hillbilly typology than just traditional stereotypes. Traditional southern stereotypes focus on the negative attributes of rednecks and hillbillies to portray characters as a caricature of southern life to make audiences laugh and entertain them. Non-traditional stereotypes are present along-side traditional stereotypes but instead contain positive attributes that conform to societal norms making redneck and hillbilly characters in reality television and docudramas more complex and structured to appeal to audiences in new ways not addressed in a review of academic literature.

Because redneck and hillbilly character construction in docudramas and reality television shows from the 2000s has not been investigated by past researchers, this study sought to highlight the existence of non-traditional stereotypes to understand the evolution of redneck and hillbilly cultural construction in television shows in genres that did not exist in the past.

Social constructionism and the work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) offer tools to understand and explain how non-traditional stereotypes are constructed in redneck and hillbilly television shows from the 2000s. The following sections use an adapted version of Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) theoretical model to code themes and subcategories to analyze data and organized the findings to discuss the construction of rednecks and

hillbillies in non-traditional, positive ways. Ashforth and Kreiner's categories of condemning condemners, supporting supporters, selective social comparisons, reframing through infusing, reframing through neutralizing, recalibrating, and refocusing (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999) were used to analyze findings in the data.

Social Weighting: Condemning Condemners

According to Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), low-status workers in jobs deemed undesirable by mainstream society use social weighting techniques to internalize their occupational ideologies while outsiders still view their occupations as having negative stereotypes. By condemning condemners, low-status workers can render the authority and knowledge of outsiders as illegitimate making outside views and beliefs dismissible (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). When applying this element of Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) theory to southern culture portrayed on television, redneck and hillbilly characters often interact with other characters outside of southern culture or with outside social groups that might believe traditional stereotypes and stigmas about rednecks and hillbillies. If southern characters condemn outsiders to their group, they may portray redneck and hillbilly culture as legitimate and containing positive attributes, which renders the authority and knowledge of outsiders to their culture as dismissible.

Seventy percent of episodes in the sample included individuals who were outside of the redneck, hillbilly, or southern culture being portrayed. Thirty-three outsiders were members of minority groups. A person was labeled an outsider if they lived in a different culture or if the main characters had to leave their normal setting to travel and meet the outsider in a non-redneck or non-hillbilly territory. For example, in season 4, episode 2 of

My Big Redneck Wedding (Bogach and Cowin 2008), a female redneck left her home to meet a wedding planner in a city setting to help her plan her wedding. Outsiders in the sample were nonmembers of redneck or hillbilly culture who intruded on the happenings of redneck or hillbilly culture in some way. Nonmembers included characters who were from outside of the southern culture being portrayed in an episode: business owners or employees, customers to redneck/hillbilly businesses, relatives from outside cultures, police officers, church members, people who lived in big cities, individuals who assisted rednecks or hillbillies with achieving goals, and friends of redneck/hillbilly characters. Rednecks and hillbillies interacted with outsiders in all 12 television shows in the sample.

In some cases, a redneck or hillbilly character interacting with outsiders was a way of showing social differences between rednecks and hillbillies versus nonmembers. For example, *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011) and *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012) specifically focused their episodes on having redneck characters interacting with non-redneck characters from the upper social classes to pit low-class southern culture against upper-class culture. In other cases, characters interacting with nonmembers was brief and part of rednecks and hillbillies trying to achieve a goal they set during the episode. An example of this was in episodes of *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013) where Eugene and Spencer periodically interacted with outsiders to help them gather supplies to build devices that would make them money, or to assist them in constructing devices which were used to provide for their families and assist in survival in the Appalachian Mountains.

To “condemn condemners,” members of a redneck or hillbilly culture and nonmembers were portrayed in a wide variety of ways making outsiders appear as

negative while at the same time constructing redneck or hillbilly culture as superior. For example, in season 2, episode 1 of *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013), an outsider sold moonshine to a gun shop owner that the hillbilly character, Eugene, had been selling moonshine to for years. Because the gun shop owner already had moonshine, he refused to buy from Eugene. Eugene is angry and says he dislikes outsiders who cause trouble. Eugene went to find the outsider to confront him. Instead of using anger or violence, the hillbilly worked to earn the outsider's respect and acted as a good neighbor by sharing homemade moonshine and by helping the outsider fix his truck using the hillbilly's skills in mechanics. By acting in a positive way and by helping the outsider and demeaning the man's actions of stealing valuable business from the moonshiner, the hillbilly condemned the outsider while at the same time showing how in his culture, people respect boundaries and act neighborly, even to enemies (*Hillbilly Blood* season 1, episode 2). In 12 episodes of *Hillbilly Blood*, outsiders were featured similarly. The hillbilly main characters were constructed as knowledgeable, charitable, kind, and intelligent people interacting with outsiders who violated hillbilly cultural norms and disrupted a way of life deemed superior by the hillbilly main characters.

This same construction of outsiders existed in five episodes of *Duck Dynasty*. For example, in season 9, episode 1 a redneck husband and his wife were visited by the wife's parents who lived in Florida. The redneck husband treated them as outsiders and referred to the nonmember parents as "yuppies" meaning people who are from city culture. The father-in-law hunted animals for fun while the redneck husband made fun of him discussing how he hunts to provide food for his family while yuppies are inexperienced with guns and waste time killing for fun. Throughout the episode the

redneck husband made fun of “yuppies” for their lack of experience with his redneck culture, and he is the voice of knowledge as the episode progresses in how to get work like hunting done properly. By constantly making his outsider father-in-law the butt of his jokes, the redneck delegitimized the outsider’s culture and actions while legitimizing his own culture. Even though the redneck husband had attributes that are nonconformist to mainstream society (has a long beard and long hair, wears camouflage pants, hates cell phone language that uses emojis, and is a member of the upper-class but violated upper-class norms by identifying as a redneck), the redneck character adhered to values society respects like providing for his family, helping outsiders because they are family, and by acting knowledgeable in tasks such as hunting to take care of his older father-in-law while outdoors engaging in risky behaviors. In all five episodes containing outsiders in Duck Dynasty, hillbilly culture was portrayed as superior while outsiders were made fun of and insulted by hillbilly main characters to validate their own culture and norms by condemning outside culture.

Making outsiders the butt of jokes was a popular technique to delegitimize nonmembers and to display rednecks and hillbilly culture as more positive in comparison. *R U Faster Than A Redneck’s* (Brutsman and Lassen 2013) basic theme involved redneck males racing American muscle cars against non-rednecks driving foreign-made cars. In all episodes outsiders were criticized and masculine humor was used to put down nonmembers as they raced their cars against rednecks. The rednecks used words like “punk,” “dicks,” “dumb,” and “preppie” in jokes to refer to foreign car drivers. They referred to foreign cars in feminine terms like “cute,” and demeaned foreign cars by always insulting them in a joking manner. Outsiders were dressed nicely in racing suits

while the redneck drivers dressed less professionally in plaid shirts, shirts with no sleeves, dirty looking shirts, and baseball caps. Some of the rednecks spoke in thick southern accents while the foreign car drivers conformed to mainstream dialect and sounded more educated. Foreign car drivers acted snobbish and disgusted or critical of redneck American-made cars. The redneck characters used the foreign car driver's elitist behaviors and attitudes to make jokes about them, so they would appear snobbish and mean and rednecks as superior in comparison. This was the only television show in the sample to display xenophobia, which is a traditional redneck stereotype. By insulting and putting down foreign car drivers, redneck characters constructed an image of superiority in redneck and American culture.

In *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012), humor was present in all episodes. Outsiders were members of the upper-class living in the Hamptons with whom redneck characters interacted while on vacation. Outsiders were portrayed as confused by the redneck family and their antics with the use of facial expressions and conversations to express bewilderment, disgust, or bemusement. Redneck characters acted as if culture was normal and made jokes of upper-class cultural practices. For example, they cracked jokes about fine dining table manners, hanging fine art in homes instead of deer heads, sports like polo and golf, and manicures. One outsider was the man renting them his house for their vacation. He was dressed in a suit jacket and button up shirt. He owned a \$1500 chair and numerous other symbols of wealth. The family treated him as a joke for his upscale preferences and home. Redneck culture was portrayed as simplistic and more logical with redneck characters balking at the cost of upscale tastes and preferring aspects

of redneck culture instead. Outsiders were the butt of jokes while redneck culture was seen as superior by rednecks in each episode.

In *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008), humor was also present in interactions between rednecks and outsiders as a way of condemning condemners. For example, *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008) season 4, episode 7 featured a pregnant woman who hired a midwife. The midwife was from a professional business and acted judgmental (unhappy facial expressions and body language) towards the redneck couple. She walked around the house finding hazards that could hurt a baby and disliked the husband who built a beer can mobile to put over the baby's crib. In response, the redneck husband constantly made jokes to respond to the midwife's criticisms making her out to be mean and sill for disagreeing with their cultural practices. *My Big Redneck Wedding* (Bogach and Cowin 2008) delegitimized outside cultures using jokes and using comedy to construct outsiders and outside cultures as less superior than redneck culture.

In *Redneck Rehab* (Ehrhard and Ehrhard 2012), members of redneck culture left for bigger cities to reinvent themselves as nonmembers. In season 1, episode 1, Patrick, a gay male, left his redneck family to live in a bigger city where he accumulated an upscale home and the monetary wealth to afford massages, luxury items, expensive clothing, and the ability to shop regularly in Park Avenue luxury shops. In season 1, episode 3, Kayla left her redneck family to join a dance company in Nashville. She was portrayed as loving fame, glamor, clubbing, and eating salads and smoothies with spinach. Both Patrick and Kayla were made fun of by redneck family for their love of upscale lifestyles. Their redneck families made jokes to put down city culture and forced their loved ones to

participate in redneck culture hoping to reintroduce them to their roots. Redneck culture was described as better because families were closer, family heritages and traditions continue for generations, and morals and values are stronger. Outside city culture was constructed as a joke and southern, redneck culture was treated as superior.

There was also a trend of expressing distrust and hatred of outsiders by numerous characters in different television shows in the sample. Discussing distrust of outsiders is another way redneck and hillbilly characters delegitimized the power of nonmembers of their culture and legitimized redneck and hillbilly actions. In episodes where distrust of nonmembers was voiced, rednecks and hillbillies either insulted the outsider's culture or they portrayed the outsider as being dangerous or threatening to their way of life in some way.

For example, in season 1, episode 8 of *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), a realtor selling expensive homes tried to sell a redneck husband and wife (Phil and Kay) a mansion. The realtor was treated as a joke by Phil and Phil's brother Si for his upper-class tastes. Si used the phrase "snake in the grass" to describe the realtor and explained he did not trust outsiders. The realtor was portrayed as an upper-class male who found excitement in showing them a \$25,000 chandelier, marble counters, and other expensive attributes to the mansions he is trying to sell. He also has problems understanding what they say using their low-status, country dialect and eventually gets exasperated with the redneck family. By treating the nonmember realtor as a joke who was ignorant and silly for his upscale tastes the rednecks delegitimized the outsider's culture making redneck culture out to be more superior because according to

them wealth cannot change who they are and living simple lives with their close family is more important.

Distrust of outsiders was expressed on in every episode of *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011). The practice of moonshining is illegal in Appalachia, so hillbilly characters building unauthorized moonshine stills risk being arrested for producing moonshine which is a way they earn money to provide for their families. In *Moonshiners*, outsiders like police officers were villainized for interfering in moonshining because that is how some southerners earn money to survive. The show glorified deviant behaviors like breaking the law because moonshining is a practice passed on from past generations and is part of family heritage and pride. Those interfering and trying to stop moonshiners are treated as bad people who are dangerous to family heritage. In all episodes of *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011) in the sample, comments about the dangers of getting caught by police and outsiders are mentioned. Police officers were actually present in two episodes and portrayed as threatening towards the hillbilly characters that acted as if they were doing something completely normal for their culture.

Another example of outsiders being constructed as threatening is season 5, episode 8 of *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010). In this episode the characters of David and Jerome accidentally drive their boat onto someone's property. The outsider has a gun and threatens them for hunting alligators near his property. David and Jerome talked about how a little kindness goes a long way and by acting respectful to the outsider, he lets them go and tells them where they can hunt freely. The outsider is approached with distrust and appears dangerous and threatening with his gun while the characters of David and Jerome are portrayed as good people who act respectful towards outsiders. In the end,

the southern main characters prevail and use kindness to win the dangerous outsider over who then helps direct the men to a proper hunting spot allowing the southern hunters to continue to practice alligator hunting as their way of life.

In conclusion, in this sample of 110 episodes from 12 docudramas and reality television shows featuring southern themes, southern characters condemned outsiders to their group and portrayed redneck and hillbilly characters positively. Outside cultures were constructed negatively as a way of delegitimizing outsiders. Jokes and humor were used by rednecks and hillbillies to concoct an image of nonmembers as being ridiculous, as behaving wrongly, and as not conforming to redneck or hillbilly culture. The rednecks and hillbillies behaved as if their way of life was the norm and outsiders were norm breakers. Mistrust towards nonmembers was another way for hillbilly and redneck characters to condemn outsiders. Nonmembers were treated as dangerous, threatening, and destructive to redneck and hillbilly culture.

Social Weighting: Supporting Supporters

Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) theory included the idea that low-status workers in jobs deemed undesirable by society use a social weighting technique of supporting supporters where outsiders who support those participating in dirty work are given credibility and legitimacy. When applying this concept to southern culture portrayed in docudrama and reality television shows, characters often interact with individuals outside of the main redneck or hillbilly social group the show focuses on. When outsiders are accepted and participate in redneck or hillbilly culture, this helps give credibility and

legitimacy to the behaviors of the redneck or hillbillies and their actions to create non-traditional stereotypes.

Thirty-six percent of the episodes in the sample contained characters who were outsiders to redneck or hillbilly culture and participated in activities with redneck and hillbilly characters. Outsiders helped rednecks and hillbillies with tasks to achieve goals. Nonmembers also participated in leisurely activities with rednecks and hillbillies. By participating in positive interactions, outsiders conveyed acceptance of the southern culture rednecks and hillbillies came from giving them credibility and legitimacy.

For example, in the three episodes of *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), outsiders participated in catching catfish using their bare hands and feet after being taught this technique by the hillbilly business owners of Big Fish Adventures. These outsiders were clients of this business on vacation from big cities. Outsiders were city residents from the middle and upper-classes who were unaccustomed to wading through rivers to catch fish without tools. By participating in the business of catching fish with their bare hands and feet, the clients of the business gave credibility to the hillbillies technique of fishing by having fun, succeeding in catching fish, praising the experience, behaving happily by laughing and smiling, and in having positive interactions with hillbilly team members.

In *My Big Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012) outsiders were featured in all episodes in the sample and often joined the redneck family in antics associated with their culture. For example, residents of the Hamptons attended the wedding of a redneck couple and ate what was stated as traditional redneck food like alligator and squirrel. The couple's wedding planer was supportive of their idea of decorating with beer cans, having

chickens as pets, and the groom wanting to put deer heads on the wedding cake. Outsiders were often portrayed as surprised by the outlandish behaviors of the redneck family, but were often supportive of their activities and participated with happy expressions on their face.

Swamp People (Peterson 2010) featured the concept of supporting supporters when outsiders expressed encouragement towards the southerners who worked hard catching alligators to sell as meat. Outsiders praised them for their knowledge and hunting skills. Catching alligators is dangerous and difficult work, and outsiders supported their efforts and reinforced the construction of southern characters as hard working individuals completing vital jobs members outside of the southern culture featured might not have the skills and specialized education to do. Outsiders who supported southern main characters included people who the main characters killed alligators for because they were dangerous and causing problems, a business owner, and the buyer of alligator meat.

A third example was in *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013), where the hillbilly characters Eugene and Spencer interacted with outsiders in 12 episodes in the sample. Outsiders were sometimes people who offered help to the hillbilly characters, business owners who bought products the hillbilly characters produced, and people needing some type of help. Eugene and Spencer's interactions with outsiders always had positive outcomes with hillbilly culture constructed positively and outsiders accepting hillbilly culture as useful.

A final example of supporting supporters included four episodes of *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011) where outsiders were featured in supportive roles. Outsiders

included professionals in their occupations: a junkyard manager, police officers, and a NASA specialist. These individuals helped the redneck scientist team in their efforts to engineer devices and conduct science experiments. Redneck characters treated outsiders positively and as sources of knowledge. In return the outside character treated the redneck characters with respect and appeared happy to participate in assisting them with their work.

Social Weighting: Selective Social Comparisons

Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) last social weighting technique was making selective social comparisons where dirty workers, or this case, rednecks and hillbillies use selective comparisons to outside social groups who are similarly stigmatized which helps provide self-esteem and feelings of pride. When reconfigured to apply to television shows focusing on a redneck or hillbilly theme, if members of outside stigmatized groups (minority groups for example) are included they can be seen as a comparison group that aid redneck and hillbilly characters in creating images of high self-esteem and pride.

Thirty-three episodes in the sample included characters of non-white races or identified as homosexual. In all 33 episodes, interactions between minority groups and redneck and hillbilly characters were positive. By including characters from similarly stigmatized minority groups, redneck and hillbilly characters constructed an image of accepting diversity and inclusivity.

In six episodes in the sample, men were featured who were gay. Sexual orientation was mentioned but not a central storyline to episode plots. Focus was instead on redneck and hillbilly characters or culture and how these men interacted positively

with redneck and hillbilly characters. Redneck and hillbilly characters were constructed as accepting and not caring about a person's sexual orientation but focused on creating positive relationships with outsiders to their culture.

Twenty-seven episodes in the sample contained individuals from racial minority groups. In some cases, members of racial minority groups were labeled as rednecks, hillbillies, or occupied a similar social status as redneck and hillbilly characters. In *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), two episodes featured a man who is an American Indian and part of the Houma tribe. Even though only two episodes in the sample featured this character, he is a dominant and regularly occurring character in the show. This man was not labeled as a redneck or hillbilly but was constructed as equal to the southern characters in the show and as working the same occupation. *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010), also featured an African American man nicknamed "Pepper" who worked with a white male southern character nicknamed "Salt." These two characters were the only people in the sample of 110 episodes to directly discuss the topic of racism. Both characters stated they were raised to not care about skin color and to be accepting to all people. The two characters were constructed as having a friendly relationship where they shared a meal and hunted successfully as a team.

In *Redneck Island* (Abrego and Austin 2012), one African American female self-identified as a redneck to compete in challenges to win money. Other than self-identifying as a redneck, this female did not exemplify any traditional stereotypes associated with redneck culture. Her presence in a cast of white males and females identifying as rednecks constructed the image that redneck culture contains some diversity but this could be considered tokenism which gives a group the illusion of

solidarity while hiding the actuality that racism exists within an actual culture (Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro 2012). *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011) featured several African American men and women, an Asian male, and two gay male partners who were tourists learning to catch catfish with their hands. Focus was placed on their status as outsiders to hillbilly culture and how they enjoyed their experiences and found success in learning to fish using their bare hands. By featuring members of minority groups, the show constructed an image of diversity and acceptance.

My Big Redneck Wedding (Bogach and Cowin 2008) featured a white male and female dominated cast in all episodes except for one. In season 4, episode 4, a Cuban man who considered himself a redneck was marrying a white redneck women. The Cuban man's family was featured and redneck characters interacted with them as equals in having a fun and positively constructed wedding ceremony. Redneck and Cuban culture were combined into the ceremony constructing an image of acceptance and diversity within redneck culture.

Building and Using Ideology: Reframing-Infusing

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) also designed a model for understanding how low-status workers in jobs deemed undesirable by mainstream society build and use ideologies to create feelings of high self-esteem and pride. Reframing by using "infusing" is where dirty workers reconstruct the meanings an occupation is attached to that are stigmatized into positive images treated as a badge of honor. Using the work of Huber (1999), southerners have redefined the term "redneck" as a way of dealing with stigmatization and have reconstructed the term to mean a hard working, blue-collar

individual. By reframing the meaning of what it means to be a “redneck,” “hillbilly,” or “southerner” characters redefine negative stigmas into badges of honor (Huber 1999).

In no episode did a redneck or hillbilly character show shame or embarrassment about their culture. The episodes included in the sample focused on characters who displayed positive images about southern culture while at the same time displaying traditional negative stereotypes about rednecks and hillbillies (exhibiting low class culture, being dirty, living in trailers, drinking large quantities of beer, doing wild and dangerous things for fun, speaking in uncultured (meaning uneducated) language (mountain/southern accents and a characters’ vernacular), being dirty, being poor, etc). Even when characters displayed traditional stigmatized stereotypes, those stereotypes were not always the main focus of a television show, and non-traditional stereotypes were present to construct redneck and hillbilly culture as containing badges of honor.

An example of reframing was the redefining of the attributes redneck females may have. According to the data collected in this study, women in the southern-themed television shows in the sample follow traditional stereotypes about redneck and hillbilly women but also are untraditional in numerous ways. According to Hubbs 2010, male figures dominate redneck identity in media outlets up until the mid-2000s. Her research determined that women were portrayed as the wives or girlfriends of rednecks. Slade, Givens-Carroll, and Narro (2012) also discussed sexism and how women were the butt of men's jokes and treated as incompetent or unintelligent compared to men. According to this study, women, while being portrayed as stereotypical females (being mothers/wives to redneck males, as being feminine, and as sex symbols) also deviate from traditional women in southern themed media by having dominance as characters, as being

breadwinners and workers, and being more than wives and mothers. Female rednecks and hillbillies were non-traditional in 59 episodes and were able to do physical labor, were successful hunters of wild animals, were not afraid to get dirty, wore camouflage and dirty t-shirts with jeans, were professionals in their occupations, were educated and had specialized skills to complete jobs to support their families, and identified as rednecks alongside their male counterparts. Over half of all episodes in the sample (53%) contained women who were rednecks or hillbillies acting in non-traditional ways. In three episodes of *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) a mother-daughter team hunted and killed alligators as a job to provide for their family. In *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), the wives of the hillbilly characters helped run their family business and acted as bosses to keep the business organized and profitable. In *Hillbilly Handfishin* (Greensfelder and Gallagher 2011), female employees were hillbillies and worked alongside men to teach tourists how to catch catfish as part of their job. In *Moonshiners* (Johnson 2011), one female character was an equal partner with her boyfriend in their moonshine business and built stills, conducted business exchanges, and used her creativity to engineer and develop new types of moonshine. Women in these shows reconstructed the roles of women in redneck and hillbilly culture as positive and appreciating of strong females who work hard, have jobs, have education and specialized skills, and are more equal to men.

Hard work in general was a common theme used to reconstruct the image of rednecks and hillbillies more positively. Seventy-five percent of the sample contained individuals participating in some type of hard work. Hard work included characters participating in their occupations and characters participating in physical labor. Seventy-

five percent of episodes in the sample contained characters with some type of occupation. Examples of occupations included NASA scientists, mechanics, engineers, taxidermists, a welder, a Tae Kwan Do school owner, a former teacher, hand-crafted knife production, moonshine production, professional hunters, and assorted business owners. Being redneck or hillbilly in the sample of 110 episodes was closely associated with working hard and in some cases blue-collar culture, which was similar to the findings of Huber (1999) who closely associated blue-collar status with redneck portrayals in the media. This was not always the case and in some episodes hard-working rednecks and hillbillies were constructed not as members of the working class but as members of the middle and upper-classes giving the impression that redneck and hillbilly culture exists in all social classes successfully.

Building and Using Ideology: Reframing-Neutralizing

Reframing by neutralizing is where workers do something that counteracts negative stereotypes or attributes attached to a status. When reconfigured to apply to television shows featuring redneck and hillbilly themes, characters take actions that counteract negative stereotypes. Negative stereotypes about rednecks or hillbillies might be present in a television show, but characters behave in positive ways that take the focus off negative attributes and counteracts negative stereotypes.

Having a college education was one way negative stereotypes were counteracted, and redneck or hillbilly culture could be reframed in positive ways. For example, in *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) a father was proud of his son for going to college and earning a degree but was also extremely happy he returned to the family tradition of

hunting alligators, which was a family tradition as a way of making money to take care of the family. By talking about his pride in his son in numerous episodes for getting a college degree, he focused on showing someone from a lower-status southern culture in a positive way. At the same time the show remained traditional with the man and his son working a dangerous and physically hard job, hunting wild animals which is associated with a working class occupation. *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011) focused every episode in the sample on the main character's PhD education in aerospace engineering and his father's career as a NASA engineer as their main roles and their status as rednecks as less important. Even though they used negative stereotypes about rednecks to teach lessons in science, math, and engineering, their high social status and education counteracted their adoption of redneck southern cultural elements.

Secondly, redneck and hillbilly characters having occupations and constructing images where they participate in hard work to provide for their families counteracted negative attributes associated with traditional stereotypes. Seventy-five percent of episodes in the sample featured individuals with jobs that required hard work for success and this was the main focus displayed to viewers. Characters status as rednecks and hillbillies exhibiting traditional undesirable traits was treated as less important and given less focus in scenes. Characters behaved in traditional stigmatized ways but at the same time displayed positive traits by being hard workers with careers.

A third example would be the use of Christian elements in storylines. Thirty-seven episodes in the sample featured Christian symbols or practices. Every episode of *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeier 2012) featured the parents, grandparents, and grandchildren gathered at the end of each episode having dinner and a prayer being

said. Each episode in the series had redneck characters who were wealthy millionaires behaving in stigmatized ways as part of the storyline. By focusing viewers' attention on the wealth of the characters, their Christian religion, and displays of good morals and values, the characters counteracted the negative stereotypes attached to their redneck culture to appear more desirable and conforming to mainstream norms.

Patriotic elements appeared in 63% of the sample. Patriotism and showing displays of honoring their home culture, the United States, or living in the south could be interpreted as a way of neutralizing or counteracting negative stereotypes. For example, two redneck characters paused to say a prayer and honor the American flag after visiting a children's camp founded in 1904 that was destroyed by hurricane Katrina in season 5, episode 8 of *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010). Before this, the characters were hunting animals, dressed dirty, and were working physically hard in the hot sun which were images focused on for audiences. During the prayer scenes focus was placed on their pray and respect for the American flag. The characters explained they stopped to pray and honor the destroyed camp to show respect for the families who lost everything. By focusing a scene of southern characters honoring the American flag and praying to show respect, the characters could be interpreted as focusing on their positive behaviors and values rather than their status as southerners. Patriotism and including flags and moments to honor the United States or southern culture displayed rednecks and hillbillies in positive ways as respecting and honoring where they live.

Building and Using Ideology: Recalibrating

Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) concept of recalibrating is where groups of workers themselves determine what is considered "dirty" or as negative. For this study, recalibrating was when redeeming qualities about characters' roles as southerners was focused on. Television shows in the sample of 110 episodes featuring southern cultural themes focused on education, occupations, strong and dominant female characters, wealth, Christian values, patriotism, ancestry, and close family ties. These themes contained subcategories that adhered to mainstream norms and allowed characters to conform to mainstream societal values and expectations.

Episode plots contained emphasis on positive qualities of redneck and hillbilly culture. For example, twenty-five percent of the episodes in the sample had women with occupations who were breadwinners for their families and dedicated significant storylines to these women displaying their abilities as redneck women who were wives and mothers but were intelligent, ran businesses, had physically demanding and dangerous occupations, and took risks. This is one way shows in the sample "recalibrated" by focusing on female characters' achievements while minimizing focus on their status as a redneck or hillbilly.

Characters who were educated or had specialized educational skills had those qualities focused on in episodes. Episode storylines revolved around redneck and hillbilly characters who used their knowledge and skills in their occupations or in everyday tasks. By focusing on education and specialized educational skills, episodes constructed redneck and hillbilly characters as intelligent, driven to succeed in their occupations, and

capable of completing tasks and goals that required a college education or specialized skills obtained through training, heritage, or life experiences.

In 107 episodes in the sample, wealth and material possessions were used to construct redneck and hillbilly culture as comparable to middle or upper-class culture. In 59 episodes, characters lived in middle or upper-class neighborhoods. For example, in *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), hillbilly characters were millionaire business owners who lived in mansions and owned possessions indicating the family was wealthy. In 107 episodes, characters owned material possessions indicating characters had some type of wealth to afford possessions not needed for survival but for leisure or pleasure. In 26 episodes, southern characters specifically stated dollar amounts for how much they earned completing tasks as part of their occupations. For example, in Season 8, episode 5 of *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) a six-foot alligator that was killed by southern characters was worth \$78 when sold to a meat market business. Focus placed on money, wealth, and material possessions helped southern themed television shows in the sample constructed an image of success and positive qualities.

Christian beliefs, patriotism, and family relationships being present as themes constructed redneck and hillbilly characters as having positive values and morals commonly appreciated in mainstream society. Thirty-seven episodes in the sample included portrayals of Christianity in some form. Sixty-nine episodes contained subcategories related to the theme of patriotism. Ninety-four episodes contained family relationships. By including religious and patriotic symbols and discussions, and a focus on family ties and ancestry, the interactions between characters focused less on redneck

and hillbilly stereotypes and more on redeeming qualities characters had that adhered to norms appreciated and accepted in mainstream society.

Building and Using Ideology: Refocusing

Lastly, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) used the concept of refocusing to understand how workers' put more emphasis on nonstigmatized features so stigmatized qualities of their jobs were less focused on. When applied to television shows featuring southern cultures like rednecks and hillbillies, focus is put on themes that are valued by mainstream society. This study focused on the themes of religion, education and specialized skills, occupations and hard work, patriotism, females in non-traditional roles, wealth and material possessions, ancestry and family, diversity, and the presence of outsiders. Within these themes, redneck and hillbilly characters in the sample exhibited behaviors that refocused attention from stigmatized stereotypical features onto non-stigmatized features.

Every episode in the sample contained themes that are in some way valued by mainstream society and assisted southern characters in conforming to societal norms. For example, 34% of the sample contained religious symbols or displays of Christianity. Because Christianity is a dominant religion in the United States, religion helped characters refocus attention from stereotypical redneck or hillbilly attributes onto characters' Christian values. *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeier 2012) employed the use of Christian rituals and symbols in every episode of their show making their religious affiliation a dominant part of their "hillbilly" culture. Outside of the show, the Robertson family members of *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeier 2012)

are famous for their devotion to Christianity and some family members like Phil Robinson travel and are hired as public speakers about their Christian beliefs (Baily 2013). “The Duck Dynasty fan is laughing and praying with the Robertsons instead of laughing and gawking at them...I think that scores nicely with the audience to see folks from that subculture poking fun at themselves as opposed to outsiders doing it” (Baily 2013).

Though less prominent in other shows, Christianity often appeared in the form of symbols in the background of redneck and hillbilly themed television shows of the 2000s. Symbols included crosses on walls, churches, jewelry with crosses, and tattooed crosses on character’s body parts. Two prayer scenes were included in *Swamp People* (Peterson 2010) when characters encountered areas destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and prayers were said as a sign of respect for the lives and places lost in the hurricane. One episode of *Hillbilly Blood* (Miller 2013) was dedicated to helping a Pentecostal Church preacher catch snakes to use in church rituals. Even though religion was less dominant in shows other than in *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012), the presence of Christian imagery could be interpreted as recalibrating mechanisms to make redneck and hillbilly characters representative of values and beliefs dominant in mainstream society to refocus viewers attention on less stigmatized features.

Sixty-nine percent of episodes in the sample featured characters with a college education or skills obtained through specialized training. Mainstream society values individuals having an education and having a job. Seventy-five percent of episodes (83 out of 110) in the sample had characters with an occupation. Occupations included moonshine production, professional hunting, blacksmithing, farming, former military

service, running a vegetable stand, and owning businesses (examples are a duck call business, a restaurant, a bakery, liquor production, knife building, catfishing camp, taxidermy, and auto body or machine shops). Characters with jobs were portrayed as working physically hard jobs, as providing for their families, and as being some type of professional in their field of expertise (examples: mechanics, professional hunters, welders, moonshine manufacturers with legal businesses, and running a camp to teach tourists how to catfish).

Because occupations and education were emphasized in episodes in the sample, focus was taken off of redneck and hillbilly lifestyles and behaviors and placed on the occupations of rednecks and hillbillies or on the specialized skills sets they used to complete jobs. Rednecks and hillbillies were presented as professionals in their field of work even if their field of expertise was deviant (example: illegal moonshine businesses). Instead of being associated with ignorance, poverty, and laziness as found by past researchers, rednecks and hillbillies in docudramas and reality television of the 2000s linked rednecks and hillbillies with hard work, monetary and material wealth associated with the middle and upper-classes, and intelligence and education. Even though stigmatized features associated with working in dirty jobs as rednecks or hillbillies existed, southerners used their occupations, educations, and skill sets to attract focus on positive attributes of qualities mainstream society values in terms of having jobs and working hard.

Fifty-four percent of the sample had dominant female characters who went against traditional stereotypes by displaying women as hard workers, as having occupations, as having special skills, engaging in physically demanding activities, as

taking risks, and as being treated as equals who are shown respect by male characters. Women were valued for their independence, knowledge, education, and specialized educational skills. Even though women were labeled as rednecks or hillbillies, females were portrayed positively which is valued by mainstream society. By constructing women as positive role models who were strong and independent, focus was less on their status as rednecks and hillbillies and more on their abilities and capabilities.

Ninety-seven percent of episodes in the sample had characters displaying wealth or material possessions not associated with living in poverty, which historically has been associated with stigmatized redneck and hillbilly stereotypes. Hillbillies in *Duck Dynasty* (Gurney, Bryant, and Neumeyer 2012) were millionaires living in mansions. Rednecks in *My Redneck Vacation* (Iracleanos 2012) and *Bayou Billionaires* (Johnson 2011) lived in luxury with material wealth in every scene. *Rocket City Rednecks* (Lopez 2011) featured rednecks with PhDs and careers with NASA who lived in upper-class homes. Even in television shows where characters were not wealthy, rednecks and hillbillies still owned material possessions not associated with living in poverty. ATVs, new or nice looking vehicles, weapons, and home décor (furniture, decorations, and other objects in the background) indicated characters had comfortable lifestyles. Focus on characters and their displays of wealth and material possessions emphasized redneck and hillbilly culture positively.

Eighty-five percent of episodes displayed storylines that included messages about the importance of family and family heritage, or displays of close family relationships. By focusing on family dynamics, a character's redneck or hillbilly status became a secondary focus for audiences. Storylines focusing on family, portrayed characters and

their relationships with spouses, children, parents, and siblings as important in the southern cultures being featured. Family members were constructed positively and as being close, as having regular contact and strong bonds, as sharing heritage and ancestry, and as passing knowledge and skills from generation to generation that remain strong in importance.

By focusing southern-themed television shows on characters who exhibit qualities conforming to societal norms, redneck and hillbilly characters may act in stereotypical stigmatized ways, but they refocus viewers attention from negative attributes onto positive displays of how they conform to societies expectations. Negative, traditional stereotypes were still strong and prominent in the sample of 110 episodes but by including non-traditional stereotypes construction of redneck and hillbilly characters refocused on positive attributes as well as negative ones.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to highlight how redneck and hillbilly characters are still the same stereotypical beings they have historically been in television shows while becoming more evolved in the 2000s to display positive non-traditional stereotypes. Traditional stereotypes still dominate the airwaves, but in the 2000s with the invention of docudrama and reality television show genres, southern characters display more complexity and show common themes not addressed in past research. This study sought to demonstrate the limitations of traditional stereotypes in capturing the complexity of hillbilly culture and lifestyle.

In this study my goal was to bring attention to the idea that redneck and hillbilly stereotypes have evolved over time and to analyze areas of change in relation to television shows in the 2000s compared to those produced in 1960-1990. While conducting a literature review focusing on redneck and hillbilly stereotypes, I found researchers focusing on historical stereotypes in relation to media produced in the 1990s through the 2000s. Very little was found discussing changes in historical stereotypes related to hillbillies and rednecks in the 2000s. As someone from Appalachian culture where the hillbilly stereotype is prominent and part of local heritage, I felt that society changed in the 2000s so that hillbilly and redneck stereotypes evolved to be more complex.

In the 2000s, the redneck revolution was a time of mass production of redneck and hillbilly-themed television shows. Even though 12 television shows were included in this study, numerous other redneck and hillbilly themed television shows were produced

to entertain audiences. The main difference with the 2000s compared to past media portrayals was the use of docudrama and reality television genre formats to construct southern cultures. Past research did not focus on genres outside of the realm of comedy. Docudramas and reality television show formats differ greatly compared to comedy formats by documenting real life, which contains complex storylines and relationships. By introducing viewers to rednecks and hillbillies in more realistic situations documenting real life, southern stereotypes continue to exist in the media but include more complexity to construct rednecks and hillbillies as real people instead of comedic caricatures only existing for quick laughs.

In this study, I wanted to discuss the departure of redneck and hillbilly characters from the realm of comedy and the differences that exist now that southern characters are featured in more serious genres of media. Docudramas and reality television shows seek to document real life allowing television show producers to create complex characters, which is reflected in changes found in redneck and hillbilly cultures portrayed in southern themed television shows. Non-traditional stereotypes are now prominent parts of the make-up of redneck and hillbilly themed television shows. Rednecks and hillbillies in fictional television shows can live in trailer parts and eat squirrels while at the same time obtain college educations and have respected careers. Traditional stereotypes dominate comedy portrayals of rednecks and hillbillies while non-traditional stereotypes reframe and reconstruct southerners to be more than stigmatized figures in more serious genres of television. The popularity of rednecks and hillbillies in docudramas and reality television shows in the 2000s reflects a period of growth where new ways southern characters are

portrayed were developed and redneck and hillbilly characters became more realistic people instead of mere caricatures making fun of a culture.

Limitations of the Study

Religion, education, specialized educational skills, patriotism, females in non-traditional roles, occupations, hard work, wealth/material possessions, diversity, the presence of outside cultures, and ancestry/family are common themes found in redneck and hillbilly docudramas and reality television shows from the 2000s. This study was designed to address the existence of each of these themes with a brief overview of content within each theme relating to new stereotypes that have developed with the creation of docudrama and reality television genres. This study was not designed to give an in-depth analysis of every theme but to highlight important features in need of more research. Each one of these themes is complex and requires more research to fully understand new stereotypes and commonalities that exist in redneck and hillbilly media from the 2000s. This study was designed to highlight the existence of themes containing non-traditional stereotypes to create awareness for future researchers seeking to understand changes in redneck and hillbilly stereotypes in the 2000s.

This study was also limited in the data available for analysis. Because episodes included in the study were obtained through a convenience sample, the sampling frame was limited to what was accessible at the time this study was conducted. Numerous television shows with redneck and hillbilly themes from the 2000s exist that were not included as part of this study because they were inaccessible. Television shows featuring rednecks and hillbillies in docudramas and reality television genres that were not

included in analysis may contain vital information in understanding non-traditional and traditional stereotypes. Also, television shows exist for the purpose of entertainment. They do not necessarily portray real life but display stories and characters to entertain audiences which limits how applicable information found in these show is to real life society.

Future Research

In the future, each theme included in this study needs more in depth analysis to understand non-traditional stereotypes and deviants from traditional stereotypes found in past research. Because this study had numerous themes and subcategories, a brief overview of each theme was provided. In future research each theme and subcategory need individual focus to provide a detailed and fuller understanding of non-traditional stereotypes and how redneck and hillbilly characters are constructed based on each non-traditional stereotype.

APPENDIX A

Coding Scheme Used To Identify Elements of Pride and High Self-Esteem

Religion: Contains religious practices or symbols that show characters having pride in their religious affiliation.

Education: Characters have special education, skills, and knowledge. This can include education obtained from college degrees, skills associated with specialized jobs, knowledge obtained from special education handed down through ancestral relations not available to mainstream society.

Patriotism: Contains symbols or practices showing pride in a character's state of residence and country.

Masculinity: Characters exhibiting pride or high self-esteem related to masculine concepts. Masculinity can be portrayed in a wide variety of ways including fighting, drinking, patriarchal roles, being breadwinners for a family, hunting, weapon or tool use, material possessions, and more.

Femininity: Contains female characters or references to females. Females are labeled non-traditional for going against historical portrayals of females as weak, secondary characters, less important than males, and as the butt of men's jokes. Females are labeled as traditional for portrayals of women that follow historical portrayals of females as weak, secondary, characters, less important than males, and as the butt of men's jokes.

Occupation: Contains a key theme revolving around an occupation or characters and the occupation they hold.

Wealth/Material Possessions: Contains displays of wealth or material possession ownership associated with the middle or upper classes going against traditional views of rednecks/hillbillies as poor and living in poverty.

Ancestry/Family: Contains family relationships or mentions of ancestry important to characters.

Diversity: Contains elements of cultural diversity and includes individuals from outside of the main Southern culture featured.

Outsiders: Contains individuals from outside of the southern culture focused on in the episode.

APPENDIX B

Table 2.1 Coding Scheme For Social Weighting Behavior and Ideology Building/Using

Social Weighting	Major Concept	Conceptual Definition	Content	
			Manifest: What kinds of words/	Latent: What Kinds of Meanings
Condemning Condemners	Supporting Supporters	<i>“City culture” and outside cultures are condemned. Any culture outside of the rural south is criticized, made fun of, and southern, rural culture is promoted.</i>	Southerners as workers, as educated, as having close family ties, as connected to ancestral relations/history, as patriotic, as having Christian values, as having women in dominant roles, and	<i>Southern characters criticize ore make outside culture to be comedic. Southern culture is portrayed as containing positive elements better than outside cultures.</i>
			Outsiders participating in redneck/hillbilly activities. Outsiders interacting with redneck/hillbilly characters in positive ways. Outsiders supporting the work of redneck/hillbilly characters.	The inclusion of outsiders to episodes legitimizes redneck/hillbilly behaviors. Outsiders are portrayed as supporting redneck/hillbilly characters in some way and appreciating the work or behaviors they portray.
			Diverse cultures and characters included as part of the storyline. Social groups included are members of different but similarly stigmatized minority groups.	By including a diverse cast, rednecks/hillbilles attempt to display acceptance of a diverse world. This goes against past stereotypes displaying rednecks and hillbilles as racist and closed off from society.
Selective Social Comparisons	Reframing	<i>Southerners selectively compare themselves to other social groups and favor comparisons to groups that are similarly stigmatized which is related to levels of self-esteem</i>	Rednecks/hillbilles do not show shame in their culture or behaviors. They display love, pride, and high self-esteem while participating in stereotypical behaviors.	Rednecks/hillbilles take images/behaviors seen by outsiders as negative and turn them into positives.
			<i>Reconstructing the meanings attached to occupations stigmatized negatively by “infusing” where stigma is transformed into an honorable badge imbedded with positive value and “neutralizing,” which is where negative attributes are counteracted</i>	By combining negative stereotypes about rednecks/hillbilles with positive imagery, negative attributes are counteracted.
			<i>Maximize redeeming qualities within a southern role</i>	Focus on conforming to values of mainstream society to show southerners in positive ways.
Building and Using Ideology	Recalibrating	<i>Stigmatized features are focused on less and nonstigmatized features are focused on more.</i>	Focus of episodes on education, occupations, strong females, and other non-stereotypical images	By focusing on what redneck/hillbilles do, characters can focus viewers attention to more positive imagery.
			Focus is on work, education, parties, accomplishing goals, having fun, and rather than on stigmatized features	

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