

Coming to Appreciate the Redneck Stereotype: A Value Analysis of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*

A Senior Project  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Communication Studies  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Arts

by  
Bevie Tyo

Dr. Julia K. Woolley

---

Senior Project Advisor

---

Signature

---

Date

Dr. Bernard Duff

---

Department Chair

---

Signature

---

Date

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	pg 3
Literature Review.....	pg 4
<i>Theoretical Background of Culture</i> .....	pg 4
<i>Stereotypes on Reality Television</i> .....	pg 5
<i>Southerner Stereotype on Television</i> .....	pg 6
<i>Defining Redneck</i> .....	pg 7
Method.....	pg 9
Summary of Episodes.....	pg 10
<i>Background of Here Comes Honey Boo Boo</i> .....	pg 10
<i>Synopsis of Episode One</i> .....	pg 12
<i>Synopsis of Episode Two</i> .....	pg 13
Applying Cultural Value Analysis.....	pg 15
<i>Positive Representations</i> .....	pg 15
<i>Problematic Representations</i> .....	pg 16
<i>Evaluation</i> .....	pg 16
Discussion.....	pg 17
<i>Shirley's Experiment</i> .....	pg 18
<i>Comparing Shirley's Experiment</i> .....	pg 19
Conclusion.....	pg 21
Works Cited.....	pg 23

## Introduction

In today's society it is nearly impossible to not come across a reality TV show when flipping through channels. Reality television dominates mainstream television programming providing relatively inexpensive entertainment (Cohen & Weimann 2001). Goddard defines reality TV as "the edited footage of unscripted interactions, broadcasted as a television series about participants naturally occurring social life" (73). The audience gets hooked on reality TV shows, most of which do not portray the best morals about society. For example, some reality TV shows exhibit plastic surgery or make overs, friends or enemies constantly fighting, or people living a glamorous lifestyle. In addition, there has been a growing interest in people's perception of reality TV. (Cohen & Weimann 2008). Although many people don't like to admit they are watching reality TV, they secretly have a guilty pleasure for tuning in and watching "unscripted" behaviors of others (Aeschbacher, Hellmueller, Beck 2).

Rural Southern whites have a long history of tackling the perceptions of the South, and an important change is that the mass media and Internet enable the general public to have more access to redneck characterizations (Shirley 35). *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* is particularly interesting to look at since week after week it has very high viewer ratings. After its premier on August 8, 2012, *Honey Boo Boo* hit number 4, even though 58% of comments on Trendrr, an online digital and social media business intelligence platform, logged were negative (Puentes 2012). Critics negatively responded to the show saying it was mocking and exploitative of the life in central Georgia and of the self-described redneck family it follows (USA Today 2012). In response to the negativity, is there something so wrong with incredibly honest people being themselves and having a good time? After all, many people actually do live this lifestyle, so is it better to just ignore that people actually live this way? The redneck culture may be looked down

upon by Western culture but why exactly is that? The family may not be just like us but they are their own culture and have feelings just like every one else. Many of the viewers watch the show because of the “train-wreck aspect and because of how easily it is to make fun of the family” (Juzwiak 2012). *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* contributes to a lot of what of people imagine the redneck stereotype to be and conforms to the stereotypical redneck family. How can we characterize the representation in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, and to what extent does it exemplify the “redneck” stereotype? Secondly, to what extent is this representation problematic?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Background of Culture***

What is one thing that exists in every person’s life and defines who a person is? Culture. In essence culture ties people of a community together, gives an individual a cultural identity, and serves as the founding principles of one’s life. Warren and Fassett describe culture as, “a system of shared meanings and assumptions that draws people together within a social context of power” (11). Within each culture we find cultural values, which defined are, “the worldview of a cultural group and its set of deeply held beliefs” (Warren & Fassett 11). Simply they are a community’s beliefs about what is right or wrong, possible or impossible.

A culture binds people together who are united by a common set of experiences, beliefs, and values (Gronbeck & Sillars 201). I find myself living in the larger, more dominant culture in the United States, where as others may find themselves living in a less dominant culture known as subcultures. Gronback and Sillars describe subcultures as usually smaller collectives within the larger society that maintain their own ways of living, but accommodate themselves to a certain extent to maintain a place within larger society (201). Specifically, Southern America is a

subculture of the United States that remains more socially conservative than the rest of the country. It relies heavily on agriculture, and is known for having developed its own customs and musical styles that distinguish them from the rest of the United States. Over the twentieth century, the South has been portrayed in national media as a “culture that reflected the presumed prejudices and character flaws of its poor white rural inhabitants” (Slade & Narro 5).

Within cultures people stereotype others and hold beliefs about social groups or a type of individual. It is important to realize one’s background and culture because it sets the stage for positive communication and appreciation to take place. Over the years there have been negative stereotypes held about the South, such as slow talking and inferior, “hillbilly” appearance, and working class families. Today, reality television utilizes stereotypes to increase not only viewing audiences, but also to create better and more interesting narratives (Slade & Narro 15). *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* portrays a middle class family who create a Southern American cultural stereotype of rednecks.

### ***Stereotypes on Reality Television***

Defined, stereotypes are the characteristics ascribed to groups of people involving gender, race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin and stereotyping is defined as an oversimplified attitude people hold towards those outside one’s own experience who are different. It is a result of incomplete or misinformation accepted as fact without question and tends exists because of our selectivity in social perception and the media. Specifically, reality TV participants are often stereotypes of the diverse identities in the media such as lesbian or gay, black, heterosexual, bachelor, stud, or shy loner (Biressi & Nunn 151). Success of many shows especially docusoaps, which is a documentary-style reality TV shows (like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*) depend on the ability to cast a diverse group of people whose cultural worldviews will

clash on screen or different to the viewers watching the show (Orbe 349). People enjoy watching reality TV shows of people from cultures different than themselves because it allows them to create judgments, but unfortunately leads to stereotyping of different cultures (Biressi & Nunn 12).

Reality TV gives the viewers different stereotypes, however, producers selectively expose what the audience will see which in the end could lead to misinformation of a certain race, culture, or gender. When filming reality TV shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, they are constantly filming the family 24 hours a day for several weeks or months just to produce thirty minutes of footage for ten episodes of the first season. There is so much footage left out, giving the audience selective exposure to the most entertaining parts of their lives. This ultimately affects the viewer's perceptions and leads the audiences to stereotype because they are only given certain information about people on reality TV.

### ***Southerner Stereotype on Television***

Today, images of American Southerners on television remain a constant figure of popular culture. The portrayal of Southerners as slow or dumb due to accent and dialect, or the representation of the assumed living conditions in the Southern region as humorous, is historically grounded in the assumption that this stereotype is accurate and acceptable (Slade & Narro 5). Television programs featuring stereotypes of gender, race, or class are likely to threaten and anger social groups, yet for some reason the negative Southern stereotype is still accepted in our culture.

In Herbert Blumer's 1955 article and theory of *Race Prejudice as a sense of Group Position* it was summarized that a "scheme of racial identification is necessary as a framework for racial prejudice" (Kerrigan 2). There was a notion of presupposed racial identification as a

method in which groups build an image of themselves. For Blumer this was done through a public event. We watch reality TV and see stereotypes and social construction defined by production decisions. The producers of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* knew they were dealing with a stereotypical redneck Southern family and assumed their less than normal behavior and actions would give the audience comedic relief. Some people may think that exploiting the redneck stereotype in the small town of McIntyre, Georgia does nothing positive for our American image and sets a bad example about the way a few Americans live. However, the redneck stereotype is a culture in which perhaps viewers should come to accept because it is a lot of people's way of living and they take pride in what they do and whom they are. They are not constantly making fun about the way we live and the family on *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* simply just wants people to accept whom they are.

### ***Defining Redneck***

Rural, working-class Southern whites are often the focus of representations of the South (Shirley 35). The term redneck has developed into a regional social type imposed by upper class Southerners in order to distinguish themselves from the lower orders of Southern society (Shirley 35). Rednecks represent working-class whites, which take pride in a laid back, rural lifestyle, and resist American society's persistence on cultural and material conformity (Cobb 2005). These Southern whites, referred to as rednecks, are marked as a specific racial, regional, gendered and socio-economic cultural identities (Shirley 35). The term redneck perfectly describes the lifestyle on the show, *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, which depicts a real life family living in Southern McIntyre, Georgia. Amy Winter, general manager of TLC confirms the show is based on actual family actions by saying, "This family is 100% authentic. They are who they are, take it or leave it, but you can't make this stuff up. It's completely unfiltered, a picture of their everyday life."

The regional link between rural, Southern whites and rednecks continues, aided by the rise of “redneck discourse” in popular culture and the mass media through the broad national appeal of redneck personas on reality TV (Cobb 228). One person in particular, Jeff Foxworthy, is the most successful in making fun of redneck popular culture (Cobb 228). Foxworthy, born in Atlanta, Georgia, (coincidentally the same state the family from *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* lives) is an American comedian, television, radio personality, and author who is part of the Blue Collar Comedy Tour. He created the jokes, “You might be a redneck if...” in the beginning of the 1980s.

One important experiment conducted by Shirley will be used throughout this paper in order to appreciate *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and the redneck culture. The study examined the intra-racial boundary work respondents use to construct their regional and racial identities in relations to other whites, specifically rednecks. Shirley used 42 audiotape, face-to-face, structured, and in-depth interviews with rural, Southern whites in Mississippi. Respondents from Shirley’s experiment indicated they have encountered jokes in regard to living in the South. They also indicated they have concerns that these exaggerated portrayals may be the only information that non-Southerners have about the South, and that such misrepresentations negatively affect the image of Southerners (Shirley 35). The rise of redneck in the mass media creates a unique contemporary environment and stereotype.

Shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* adhere to these jokes because they over exaggerate redneck lifestyle by constantly focusing on just the redneck stereotype throughout the show. The show allows non-Southerners or even Southerners to make fun of the way the family lives and acts on a daily basis. This show makes the family an easy target to be made fun of because they clearly show a way that is outside if the mainstream of living. For example, the



popular TV show “South Park” made fun of the way the family lives, focusing on their weight, their infamous favorite meal “sgetti and butter”, and their slow talk. After the South Park episode aired, June fired back at the episode during a TMZ interview describing the jokes as “trashy.” She stated, “me being a big person, I didn’t take offense...just the way they portrayed the show, it was kinda trashy” (TMZ 2012). This shows that yes, the family may be different than most, but these are real people with feelings and this is their culture and lifestyle.

### **Method**

This paper examines the redneck culture of the reality show *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* in the hopes of appreciating and having a better understanding of the family’s lifestyle. For this paper I have completed a detailed textual analysis of the background of the show and the first two episodes, which together comprised as the series premier episodes. The reason I use a small sample of two episodes is because I chose the series premier of the show, which function as a preview for the season and give important background information needed in order to understand the show.

In order to take a deeper look at the culture created as a product of the language and action used by the Thompson family, I will be using a value analysis from a critical cultural perspective. The first step of conducting a value analysis of the show will be identify what is to be analyzed; in this case it will be the actions of the family on the show and how they adhere to the “redneck” stereotype. Next I will gather my information from the show carefully observing the characteristics, dimensions, and qualities of the show by watching the first two episodes. I took detailed notes regarding any unusual behaviors and actions that adhere to redneck culture, as well as direct quotes from the family. Then I will be analyzing the stereotypes that come out of the show. I will specifically evaluate the perceived “redneck” cultural stereotypes of the

family and how they value and embrace the stereotype as their everyday life and way of living. Using value analysis highlights the values and beliefs in the show *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and allows me to understand the cultural bases of, and orientation to their social and material conditions. Value analysis is important to use because it looks at the show as part of the process by which culture defines itself and its attitudes toward the external world (Gronbeck & Sillars 186). After I will be comparing *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* to an experiment done by Carla Shirley on identifying with redneck culture. By comparing Shirley's findings with the show, we will come to have more of an appreciation of the show and redneck culture.

### **Summary of Episodes**

In order to get a better understanding of the show, it is important know the show dynamic and where it stemmed from. A typical *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* episode is thirty minutes long following pageant sensation Alana, nicked name Honey Boo Boo, and her family's typical everyday life. The show is dominantly filmed in their hometown of McIntyre, Georgia and mainly filmed in their rather small house for the size of their family. Throughout the show the family members are sat down and interviewed by the camera crew as well as pulled aside during random moments for commentary. Generally, the show captures the family's crazy lifestyle and how they bond as a family. Here I will go into the season premier episodes and provide a synopsis in order to apply it to a cultural value analysis.

### ***Background of Here Comes Honey Boo Boo***

*Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* stemmed from the infamous The Learning Channel (TLC) reality series *Toddlers and Tiaras*. *Toddlers and Tiaras* first aired in 2009 and received a great deal of controversy because of the oversexualization of little girls and mothers who force their daughters to be perfect. The controversial reality show features parents who enter young children

into beauty pageants and go to extreme lengths to win. For example, moms would force their young daughters to get their eyebrows waxed before competition, get spray tans, wear excessive amounts of makeup and scandalous outfits, wear fake teeth called “flippers”, or even go on diets. One pageant mom even went to extreme lengths and dressed her three-year-old daughter as hooker during the talent portion of a pageant. The mom was trying to have her daughter Paisly represent Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* during the streetwalker scene, but went a little too far with the idea (Business Insider 2011). For many reasons, critics are concerned that the children watching the show will develop a false sense of identity and self-esteem. But in Season 5 Episode 1 “Precious Moments Pageant” we met an exceptionally different contestant, whose overwhelming bubbly personality and family made her stand out to the viewers and did not portray a false sense of identity.

Alana was the first comedic relief on *Toddlers and Tiaras* and had many people talking after the episode aired on January 4, 2012. She showed audiences that you don’t have to be a typical skinny girl to compete in pageants and was able to joke about being a little bigger than the other girls. Her energy and humor was persistent through out the entire episode making not only the audience laugh, but also the camera crew, who was constantly laughing during her interviews. After so much talk by people and the media after Alana’s (better known as Honey-Boo-Boo) episode aired, TLC knew they had an upcoming star and show.

A couple months after Alana Thompson was discovered, The Learning Channel (TLC) gave Alana and her family their own reality show called, *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. It first aired on August 2, 2012 and had an estimated 2.25 million viewers, being one of TLC’s highest-rated shows in its first season (Hickman 2012). *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* is filmed in McIntyre, Georgia, the hometown of Alana and her family: stay-at-home mom 32-year-old June

Thompson “Mama”, hard working dad Mike Shannon “Sugar Bear”, and sisters 12-year-old Lauryn “Pumpkin”, 15-year-old Jessica “Chubbs”, and 17-year-old Anna “Chickadee.”

### *Synopsis of Episode One*

The night *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* aired they featured two episodes. The first episode, “This is My Crazy Family”, took us into the daily lives of Alana and her family and they gave us background information on their family lifestyle. June starts off the episode saying, “we like to be ourselves, you like us or don’t like us, we just don’t care. We love our little life and we are having fun doing it.” The family makes it clear that they do not do anything different when being filmed and other people’s opinions does not matter to them. As the episode begins, they show a small white car with shiny rims and hot pink flames driving down the road in the family’s hometown of McIntyre, Georgia. We are then taken into the home of Thompson family at 11:03 A.M. where Alana is still sleeping. The family typically stays in bed until 12 or 2 P.M. if they have nothing to do that day. However, the one male in the household, Sugar Bear, gets up early and works seven days a week to make an income for his family. Once Alana wakes up she eats her “breakfast” in her mom’s bed, which is a big container of cheese balls, and proceeds to spill them everywhere.

The family’s house is pretty small for the family of six. The house has one bathroom for everyone, so the girls in the house typically wash their hair in the kitchen sink, which they think is more sanitary than a bath because they aren’t sitting in their own filth. After June describes how they wash their hair, she pauses in her interview to scratch the bugs in her hair and laughs about it. June tries to set good examples for her kids, but admits to not really caring about her appearance. However, every once in awhile she “paints her barn to shine it back to its original condition” (referring to putting makeup on her face).

During an interview on the first episode, the family debates on whether they are rednecks or not. Alana starts off by saying, “Yes. We are rednecks.” The rest of the family besides Sugar Bear defends themselves by saying “No we are not, we all have our teeth don’t we?” Then Sugar Bear backs Alana up saying “You ride four wheelers and play in the mud don’t cha?” This friendly argument sets the stage for them going to and participating in the annual Redneck Games in east Dublin, Georgia. June describes it as, “an annual event that is all about Southern pride, similar to the Olympics, but with a lot of missing teeth and a lot of butt cracks.” The girls proceed to compete in some of the events such as bobbing for raw pig feet and the mud belly flopping contest. Alana competed in the belly flopping contest because she “likes to get in the mud and be dirty like a pig.” At the Redneck Games, June comments on how there is a lot of broke down people out there. She describes the women there being “vulupsoius in size” and that their “vajiggile jaggile is not beautimous.” She doesn’t think it okay that people wear smaller clothes than are meant for them, however she allows her pregnant daughter Anna to wear a crop top, completely exposing her pregnant stomach.

After the family returns from the Redneck Games, they go home, sit on the couch together as a family, and eat junk food such as cheese balls and potato chips. As they are sitting there, Jessica “Chubbs” brings up how she thinks she is getting too fat. She admits to having issues at school with fitting in, and thinks her weight is one of the main reasons why. So Jessica asks her mom if she will lose 20-30 pounds with her. June agrees to but says the only thing she really needs to do to lose weight is fart 12-15 times per day.

### ***Synopsis of Episode Two***

On the second episode aired on the season premier, “Gonna Be a Glitz Pig”, the family gets a pet teacup pig named Glitzy and hires an etiquette teacher for Lauryn and Alana. They hire

an etiquette teacher because the judges of Alana's pageant said she needed to be more "refined" and June thinks Lauryn needs to have more manners. The girls showed they knew little about manners especially when Lauryn blew her nose at the table using a cloth napkin and asked the etiquette teacher Barbara Hickey if it is okay to fart at the dinner table. After the lesson, June said in an interview "no one can be proper all the time not matter who you are." The family defends themselves from their behavior and thinks it is acceptable to behave in the manner they do.

As the episode progresses, we learn more about June, the "thrift shopping mommy" who goes to the local auction every week and purchases food and household items for less than they are sold in stores even though sometimes the food is within a day of expiring. Unfortunately when they go to the auction June caves in and buys all junk food like cookies and chips, which leads her and the rest of the family to break their diets. They ultimately say they just don't care about their appearance and that every one should treat them for who they are and not what they look like.

As the episode comes to an end, it has a more serious tone for a couple of minutes when June talks about how she had her first daughter at fifteen years old and her second child by the age of seventeen. All of her daughters have different fathers, and none of them are in the picture anymore except for Sugar Bear who is Alana's dad. Sugar bear now acts as the father for all of June's girls. June wasn't able to finish high school so she got her GED instead, contrary to her 17-year-old daughter Anna who is pregnant and staying in high school. Even though they constantly joke around with each other on the show, it is evident the family all care for each other and have a good time doing family based activities. The entire family has different personalities and is outspoken, except for shy Sugar Bear, and they have no problem telling

America embarrassing facts about themselves. The only problem is almost everything they say has to be subtitled because their regional speech dialect is so difficult to understand.

### **Applying Cultural Value Analysis**

#### ***Positive Representations***

“We like to be ourselves, you like us or you don’t like us, we just don’t care, we love our little life and we are having fun doing it.” This statement shows that the family is not trying to act out the way they live, and want people to accept them for who they are. These words spoken by mama June shows a positive value of their family and that they have no shame about the way they behave. The family embraces each other’s personalities and is able to make jokes about their redneck life style. It is clear that mama June cares about her family during the Redneck Games they attend, because even though it is scorching hot out, she refuses to let her daughters swim in the lake, because she thinks it has flesh eating diseases in there. The Thompson family depicts Southern wholesome family values and family togetherness.

The dad of the household, Sugar Bear, works for the family seven days a week, while the mom stays at home jobless, since she didn’t graduate from high school. In the past, the working class has been portrayed by negative representations. According to most media scholars, images of working-class males in blue-collar jobs tilted toward trashy, immature, and irresponsible (Fleras & Dixon 582). They were portrayed as deviants that must lie and cheat to make for personal shortcomings, caricatured as clowns who deserve to be scorned, and most likely have unhealthy dependencies (Fleras & Dixon 582). Stereotypes of the working class in the media have often made up images of unmotivated and unproductive people who have no ambitions or aspirations. Although the dad has to work seven days a week to support the family, he does not live up to the stereotypical working class father that has been portrayed in past media. He may

seem like a buffoon at times during the show because of his slow antics and the way he slowly responds to situations, but overall Sugar Bear is seen as a heroic man working to make income for his family.

Aside from family matters, Alana always keeps her head high while competing during her pageants. Alana states, "I have a big pageant coming up and I am going to do great," while lifting her shirt up and pretending to talk her stomach by squeezing it together so it looks like it is talking. It is rare to see a young six year old like Alana cheering on her opponents and having a positive attitude throughout her pageants, especially since she has never won a high placing title. Alana is always enthusiastic and making new friends, which goes to show that nothing will bring down the redneck lifestyle she lives.

### ***Problematic Representations***

The reality show *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* exemplifies how television perpetuates cultural social stereotypes. In the instance of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* they portray the subset South as low-class uneducated people because of the family's behavior. One stereotypical thing the family did together during the show was participating in the Redneck Games. This event shows the family valuing the redneck culture and taking pride in it by participating in some of the events with their family and the rest of the community. The family takes value in participating and experiencing the Redneck Games because they find it to be a fun family activity to do during the summer. Every summer they look forward to participating in the Redneck Games and enjoy the Southern pride that surrounds them. Concrete values such as the dirty muddy environment at the Redneck Games communicate redneck culture and pride.



### ***Evaluation***

Alana and her family value their culture and hold Southern pride in their family values. Although not everything they do seems to be normal, the family's relationship and cultural values defines who they are. For successful understanding for the viewers of the show to take place, background knowledge about *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* concerning values, norms, and perceptions are necessary in order for clear communication across cultures. With so many different cultures, it is important to not over look or make prejudgments of other people's backgrounds because it could lead to cultural misunderstandings. Even though not everyone will agree with the way the family goes about their lifestyle, such as constantly eating junk food, not working out, or bathing in the sink, we should not dwell on the way they live and accept their culture.

One of the primary distinctions of reality TV from fictional entertainment is the "fixation on authentic personalities, situations, problems, and narratives" (Aeschbacher, Beck, & Hellmueller 7). Unfortunately TLC, The Learning Channel, doesn't seem to care about the image they construct about Southerners and are just producing the show to engage the audience. At times on the show, the producers highlight and overanalyze the redneck stereotype and fail to exhibit more values the family has. *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* does however show a real authentic family giving us constructed non-fictional entertainment.

### **Discussion**

A majority of the audience of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* critiques the show because of aspects it highlights, such as them not caring about their appearance, their family dynamics, the way they talk, etc. However, the family does nothing to put down the redneck stereotype. The family portrays a fun-loving family who has a close-knit relationship and funny personalities.

Although some of their antics may seem a little strange on the show to some people, they are brave enough to have their daily lives filmed and exploited on television so people can get a taste to see how some Southerners live. The family doesn't receive a lot of credit for their behavior because a majority of the audience hasn't come to know the redneck Southern culture. In order to try and diminish these stereotypes, I will now go into depth and talk about Shirley's study of the intra-racial boundary work respondents use to construct their regional and racial identities and compare it to *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. Comparing her study to the show will give a better understanding of the family values and the redneck culture

### ***Shirley's Experiment***

To begin, Shirley is a white person who grew up in a rural community in Mississippi, so when conducting her interviews she had the advantage of the local, cultural understandings that made it possible for her to use familiar language to further enable the respondents to share their perspectives from a localized context. Since she was able to understand and know the other peoples cultures she was able to establish more credibility more quickly with the respondents and conduct in-depth interviews about sensitive topics such as race and class. Shirley examined what redneck means to rural Mississippi whites and how they use the term, specifically focusing on the respondents' regional and racial identity constructions.

She came across many results having to do with rednecks. She first found that in order to understand how rural, Southern whites perceive the label redneck, 69% of the respondents describe being a redneck as "lifestyle and a set of values." The importance of family and community are the main aspects people identified with Southerners. When it comes to the media, 81% of the respondents report that the media and non-Southerners perceive Southerners as primarily backwards and uneducated. When asked what typed of people are called rednecks,

respondents mainly make comparisons to Southern rural lifestyles focus on the media's influence, particularly Jeff Foxworthy's jokes. In addition, Shirley found that 67% of the respondents associate rednecks with rural, Southern lifestyles and the basis for defining redneck have evolved from work attribute to leisure attributes. With that said, redneck is sometimes "a positive or at least neutral cultural description, which may explain why people who share characteristics associated with rednecks-younger, lower status and people who have lived most of their lives in their current rural communities-are more likely to link redneck to a Southern, rural lifestyle" (Shirley 45). Another result Shirley touched on was 24% distinguishing being a rural, Southern white from being a redneck rural, Southern white, who may demonstrate a range of hostile attitudes and behaviors. Lastly, when it comes to self-identifications, 24% explicitly claim to be a redneck in some way.

### ***Comparing Shirley's Results to Here Comes Honey Boo Boo***

Shirley's results inform and correlate to the way audiences may view *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. By breaking down the results of her study we will get a better idea of the importance of the Southern culture to the Thompson family, how others view the redneck culture, and where these perceptions come from.

To begin, Shirley noted in her results section the importance of how Southern whites perceive the label "redneck", and what a Southerner means to them. Aside from having a Southern accent, the importance of family and community are the main aspects identified with Southerners (Shirley 35). This correlates directly to what the Thompson family believes about their family. The family would identify themselves with the majority of the people from this study because they embrace each other's personalities as well as value each other. The family values their lifestyle and don't care how others perceive them to be. In addition, the family

values and supports their community. For example they participate together in the annual Redneck Games and have a fun time doing it with the rest of their community. This show contributes to the redneck lifestyle by showing a close relationship between family members who are not blood related since each daughter has a different dad.

A majority of the time, people have not had any experience with people from the South, and for that reason they may misperceive what the South may be like and what people from the South are like (Shirley 35). Shirley's results indicated a majority of non-Southern respondents think that the media shape people's perceptions and play a crucial in how they regard their own identities in relation to rednecks. *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* gives non-Southerners all the more reason to think that is how Southerners act. The show portrays the family doing stereotypical redneck things like participating in the Redneck Games, washing their hair in the kitchen sink, and not caring about their appearances. The media is constantly over exaggerating redneck Southern culture instead of showing more positive aspects of it and ultimately gives the audience only one idea about how to view the South instead of, leading them to create bad stereotypes.

People often associated negative characteristics with the redneck culture. Shirley's experiment found that almost half (48%) describe the redneck identity negatively based on their own understandings (35). There were three main characteristics of rednecks that non-Southerners and Southerners try to distance themselves from: crude and self-centered lifestyles, rebelliousness, and combative and racist attitudes and behaviors. Of the top three negative aspects people associate rednecks with and try to steer away from, the Thompson family only adheres to one of them: self-centered lifestyle. The family lives for the moment and doesn't really care about anything that is going on around them as long as they are having a good time.

They could care less about what other people think about them and live for the moment. The family shows no signs of having rebellious, combative, or racist behavior, which eliminates the majority of people's negative perceptions of rednecks. The audience of the show may not relate to the Southern family culture and may disapprove some of their values, but they are causing no harm to others and just being who they are.

When it comes to self-identification, the family had a hard time agreeing that they were rednecks, although they do celebrate being Southerners. In Shirley's experiment 24% of the people who claimed to be rednecks were younger men from lower status and in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, Sugar Bear was the one who agreed to being a redneck. The rest of the family besides Alana, didn't classify themselves being rednecks perhaps because they didn't recognize the variation in the definition and usage of the label redneck.

### **Conclusion**

The family members of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* are brave people for allowing cameras to come and film their daily lives. In essence, there is always going to be some negative judgments about the way others live because not everyone comes from the same cultures and therefore do not know how to appreciate everyone's different cultural values. When I first viewed the show I thought it portrayed Americans in a very bad way even though I found the show hilarious and addicting to watch. At first I was disgusted by some of their life style choices such as washing their hair in their kitchen sink and constantly eating junk food. However, now that I have done a cultural analysis on the family and rednecks, I realized that although they may behave differently then I do, they still have values and take pride in their behavior and actions.

The family of *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* may indeed behave in different normative ways than Western culture, but their culture shapes who they are. People need to understand their

own backgrounds and understand where they are coming from before making prejudgments about others. When looking at the family on their reality TV show, it is important to remember how the media shapes and creates stereotypes. *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* constructs a typical image of Southerners and the way they live. It is important to understand their culture because once we do, we are able to find hidden messages in the importance of their culture such as the family values they have. People may think of the show in a negative way, but it is simply just a family who cares about each other and takes pride in their Southern culture.

## Works Cited

- Aeschbacher, Nina, Daniel Beck, and Lea C. Hellmueller. "Factual entertainment and reality TV." *Communication Research Trends* 31.2 (2012): 4+. *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Web. 10 Oct. 2012
- Biressi, Anita, and Heather Nunn. *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*. London: Wallflower, 2005. Print.
- Buisness Insider. "The Five Biggest Controversies To Hit 'Toddlers And Tiaras'" *Business Insider*. N.p., 17 Sept. 2012. Web. 13 June 2013.
- Cobb, James C. *Away down South: A History of Southern Identity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- Cohen, Jonathan, and Gabriel Weinmann. "Who's Afraid of Reality Shows? Exploring the Effects of Perceived Influence of Reality Shows and Their Concerns Over Their Social Effects on Willingness to Censor." *Sage Journals* (2008): n. pag. Rpt. in *Communication Research*. 3rd ed. Vol. 35. 382-97. *Academic Search Elite*. Web. 10 Oct. 2012.
- Godard, Ellis. "Reel Life: The Social Geometry of Reality Shows. In Smith, Matthew J., and Andrew F. Wood. *Survivor Lessons: Essays on Communication and Reality Television*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland &, 2003. Print.
- Gronbeck, Bruce L., and Malcolm O. Sillars . Gronbeck. *Communication Criticism: Rhetoric, Social Codes, Cultural Studies*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 2001. Print.
- Hickman. "TLC's 'Honey Boo Boo' Scores Winning Ratings With Series Premiere." *The Hollywood Reporter*. N.p., 10 Aug. 2012. Web. 11 May 2013.

- Fleras, Augie, and Shane Dixon. "Cutting, Driving, Digging, and Harvesting: Re-masculinizing the Working-Class Heroic." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 4th ser. 36 (2011): 579-597. Print.
- Juzwiak, Rich. "A Portrait of a Portrait of an American Family: A Day With the Here Comes Honey Boo Boo Clan." *Gawker*. N.p., 26 Sept. 2012. Web. 24 Apr. 2013
- Kerrigan, Dylan. "Individuals, Group Recognition and the Social Construction of Race on Reality TV." *CADAAD* 5.1 (2011): 17-44. *Academic Search Elite*. Web. 10 Oct. 2012.
- Orbe, Mark. "Representations of Race in Reality TV: Watch and Discuss." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25.4 (2008): 345-52. Print.
- Puente, Maria. "TLC's 'Honey Boo Boo': Horrifying or Hilarious?" *USA Today* 22 Aug. 2012: n. pag. *Academic Search Elite*. Web. 10 Oct. 2012.
- Shirley, Carla D. "'You Might Be a Redneck If ...': Boundary Work among Rural, Southern Whites." *Social Forces* 1st ser. 89 (2012): 35. Print.
- Slade, Alison, and Amber J. Narro. *Mediated Images of the South: The Portrayal of Dixie in Popular Culture*. Ed. Dedria Givens-Carroll. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2012. Print.
- USA Today. "Honey Boo Boo' Puts Redneck Georgia in the Spotlight." *USA Today*. Gannett, 2 Oct. 2012. Web. 25 May 2013.
- Warren, John T., and Deanna L. Fassett. *Communication: A Critical/cultural Introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011. Print.
- "This Is My Crazy Family." *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. TLC. 8 Aug. 2012. Television.
- "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig." *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. TLC. 8 Aug. 2012. Television.