

**Taking Out the Trash: Middle Class Anxieties and The White
Trash Menace**

by

Tyler Chase Knowles
Class of 2016

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Sociology

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1	13
What is White Trash?	
Chapter 2	31
The Perfect Woman: A Case Study on Tonya Harding	
Chapter 3	35
Sexual Deviance	
Chapter 4	48
The Family	
Chapter 5	66
Education	
Chapter 6	80
Work and Leisure	
Chapter 7	109
Cleanliness	
Conclusion	122
Abolishing the Sin	
Works Cited	124

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Jonathan Cutler for the astonishing amount of intellectual guidance, political provocation, energetic engagement, and individual attention he has given me since Social Theory but especially during the past two semesters. Thank you for always being there for me whenever I had a moment of revelation or immense anxiety. Also thank you to his son, Nathaniel, for pointing me in the right direction with TKAM. It was well received.

Thank you to Clara Wilson for being my advisor since my first day on campus and always being there to support and encourage me. She has been one of the most influential mentors in my life and I could never say thank you enough. I am forever grateful.

Thank you to the members of the Sociology Thesis Seminar: Alix, Blaise, Kerry, Marina, and Morgan. Y'all are the best.

Thank you to Mom, Mammaw, Nick, Rachael, Cam, Col, Ava, and Sarah for being my support system. I love you guys.

Thank you to the Carrillos and Laura and Ally Godinez for allowing me to be a part of their families. Thank you could never be enough.

Thank you to everyone that helped me read through and edit this work: Lily Herman, Jordan Lem, Sean Mihaljevic, Hannah New, DanThuy Chu, Adam Macalister, and Korinne Davis.

Last but not least, thank you to all of my friends who have been an incredible support system throughout this entire process. I love you.

Introduction

This is not a thesis about *white trash*. Rather, this is a thesis about constructing *whiteness* through the analysis of *white trash* discourse.¹ At no point do I aim to define what *white trash* is or is not, nor do I aim to presume anything about any aspect of the lives of low-income white individuals. Instead, the goal of this work is to analyze how *white trash* is portrayed in various forms of discourse, such as popular media, newspaper archives, and academic journals. I explore this portrayal of *white trash* as it serves in constructing what *mainstream whiteness* is.

White trash is a reflection of anxieties that *whiteness* otherwise projects onto the *non-white*, the *Other*, and this makes *white trash* a powerful object for better understanding the construction of an *Other* in American society. The term *white trash* itself seems to be conflicting. On one hand, *white* is the dominant racial status in White Supremacist America and is so often the perpetrator of constructing this *Other*. On the other hand, trash is often the *Other* that is created, the inferior. *Whiteness* is so deeply connected to privilege, majority, and *elite*. Yet, *trash* is literally defined as "something in crumbled or broken position."² So *white trash* is a disgusted and despised version of what should be *elite* and privileged. *White trash* discourse reflects that white anxiety extends to a fear that not all *whites* abide by the terms established for *whiteness*. This anxiety concerning *white trash* is a reflection of the fragility of mainstream whiteness and the perceived threat of non-traditional whites, the *white*

¹ Whenever I refer to "*white trash* discourse" in this thesis, I am referring to mainstream discourse about *white trash*.

² Trash. (2016) In *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trash>

trash, who resemble the folk devils that sociologists have associated with moral panics.³

This thesis explores how the construction and maintenance of *white trash* derives from white social anxieties and how the projection of these anxieties onto *white trash* allows *white* to maintain its status as *pure*. Furthermore, my work analyzes the traditional stereotypes of *white trash*, along with other low-status whites, and how these stereotypes reveal the core of what *whiteness* is not. Similarly, my work explores how the persistent prejudice against *white trash* reveals the work of social norms in constructing and maintaining a social hierarchy that justifies prejudiced perceptions of low-status whites and favorable perceptions of *elite whites*.

The Reformed Sinner

The very existence of *white trash* discourse suggests that *whiteness* alone is not always enough. This discourse within *whiteness* demonstrates anxieties concerning the fact that some *whites* may not conform to the behaviors and values that are so often connected to *whiteness*. Committing to these behaviors and values, *mainstream values*,⁴ is difficult and requires the commitment and discipline of work and social organizations to maintain. Furthermore, endorsing these values serves to justify superior status in society and allows *elite whites* to distinguish themselves from their lower-status counterparts, *white trash*. In fact, *white trash* only exists in its relation to its counterpart, *whites*.

³ Cohen, Stanley. 1980. *Folk Devils and Moral Panic: the Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. Oxford: Martin Robertson; Goode, E. 1994. "Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, And Social Construction." *Annual Review of Sociology* 20(1): 149–71.

⁴ These values will be discussed in further detail in the upcoming section.

White trash is specifically constructed and maintained to differentiate between *whites* that abide by traditional norms and those that do not. *White trash* is so intrinsically tied to what whiteness is not, that *white trash* shifts in meaning to adapt to what *whiteness* hopes not to be. As a result, the portrayal of *white trash* changes and contradicts itself over time (i.e. racist at some points in time, yet too closely tied to other non-white races at others),⁵ and this is not necessarily a reflection of *white trash* behavior, but rather a reflection of what *white* behavior tries not to be.

This projection of the non-mainstream behavior onto *white trash* is similar to the *reformed sinner* mentioned in Roediger's *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*.⁶ Whites serve as the *reformed sinners* in that they "still longed for older ways, and even practiced older styles of life, guiltily."⁷ However, Roediger and Rawick argue that, in an effort to distance himself from his guilty pleasures/past sins, the white man created a "pornography of his former life" and "must see a tremendous difference in his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled."⁸ Roediger and Rawick were depicting black-white relations, but this distinction between the reformed and former self is clearly present in the construction of *white trash* as well.

In *White Savagery and Humiliation*, Annalee Newitz discusses the "redemption of innocence" that occurs by vilifying *white trash* in White-on-White crime movies.⁹ Newitz cites Steeler's research on guilt saying that "guilt makes us afraid for ourselves and so generates as much self-preoccupation as concern for

⁵ These conflicting views will be discussed further in Chapter 1.

⁶ Roediger, David R. 1994. *Towards The Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History*. London: Verso. Roediger was largely summarizing George Rawick's *Sundown to Sunup*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 64

⁹ In Wray, Matt and Annalee Newitz. 1997. *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 139.

others. The nature of this preoccupation is always the redemption of innocence, the re-establishment of good feeling about oneself.”¹⁰ Through media, *elite whites* can assume the role of the victim, as they “lose their social power when they are tortured and some of their number killed” by low-status whites.¹¹ This is the *reformed sinner* distancing himself from his past sins, and *white trash* is portrayed as the former self, a monster.

The *reformed sinner* either pities or despises his former self, and this is apparent in the dialogue surrounding *white trash*. Often, the perspectives on issues regarding *white trash* are binary and commentators are either disgusted with or come to the defense of *white trash*. Those that are disgusted and hold overt prejudice against *white trash* will be referred to as Moralists throughout this work. Their perspective normally presents *white trash* as despicable and immoral. On the other hand, those that defend *white trash* will be referred to as Defenders. While there is a distinction between the Moralist and the Defender, their opinions are similar in that they endorse mainstream values and the current social system as it exists.

Mainstream Values

White trash is the phantom of the “former self.” There are mainstream values that are the guilty pleasures of *whites* projected onto their former self, the *white trash*. These values can be divided into six distinct categories: gender, sex, family, education, work and leisure, and cleanliness. The endorsement of these values is used to claim and justify social superiority by *elite whites* and portray *white trash* as

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

inferior. However, *elites* fear that *white trash* subverts the dominant structure and ignores these virtues.

One of the *elite* values that *white trash* allegedly defies is the traditional woman. Barbara Welter argues that there are four "cardinal virtues" of womanhood—"piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity."¹² The true woman's worth is tied to her role within her family, as a mother, daughter, or wife. She is sexually pure and faithful. While men are sinful, it is the role of the wife to redeem her husband. Deviants of these behaviors are not "true women."¹³

The second *elite* value is monogamy and traditional sexual relations. Andrew Sullivan describes the "homosexual life" as a life in which "emotional commitments are fleeting and promiscuous sex is common."¹⁴ The homosexual life is reflective of deviant behaviors because the counterpart, *mainstream sex*, reflects commitment to and sexual relations with only one person. This commitment requires discipline and restraint, which are qualities that are core to distinguishing between the *elite* and the *Other*.

The third mainstream value is commitment to the mainstream family. This family, deemed the "nuclear family," consists of a married couple¹⁵ with specific roles assigned to each parent.¹⁶ The parents together serve as powerful role models¹⁷

¹² Welter, Barbara. 1966. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18(2), 152.

¹³ Welter 1966.

¹⁴ Sullivan, Andrew. 1995. *Virtually Normal: an Argument about Homosexuality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 106.

¹⁵ Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Knopf.

¹⁶ Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code Of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

¹⁷ Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Page 56 as cited in Newman, Katherine. 2002. "No Shame: The View From the Left Bank 1." *American Journal of Sociology* 107(6):1577-99.

that reinforce the importance of mainstream values as well as gender roles. The father is portrayed as the authoritative figure and the breadwinner.¹⁸ The mother's role, which is to raise the children, is dependent on the presence of a father. Without a man, a single mother struggles to gain the respect of her family and is unable to raise the children in the correct, *mainstream*, way. Thus, the "nuclear family" is dependent on a stable family with both parents, particularly of opposite genders, in the home.¹⁹ The parents then work together to ensure that the child learns the importance of hard work and looking forward to the future.²⁰

The fourth mainstream value is education. The mainstream parents are to produce children that are taught to assimilate to mainstream culture, largely through the education system. As a result, mainstream culture is "strongly attached to the education enterprise,"²¹ and most mainstream people have at least a college education.²² These college-educated individuals can then become parents that serve as role models for maintaining the perception of education as meaningful,²³ perpetuating education as a mainstream value. For example, Elijah Anderson explains that one of the differentiating factors between the "decent" family, i.e. *mainstream*, and the "street" family, i.e. *Other*, is that the "decent" family places value on outside institutions like schools to prepare their children for a better future.²⁴ Similarly,

¹⁸ Anderson 1999

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Newman, Katherine. 1999. *No Shame in My Game: the Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Knopf and the Russell Sage Foundation, 50.

²² Wilson 1996: 65

²³ Wilson 1987:56 as cited in Newman 2002

²⁴ Anderson 1999: 38

Lareau places emphasis on the “proper parent,” who “develops their children’s educational interest.”²⁵

The fifth mainstream value is industriousness and hard work. Those that endorse mainstream values, the *mainstream*, argue that hard work and employment as opposed to receiving welfare leads to a good life.²⁶ This makes a clear distinction between the *mainstream* (steady employment) and the *Other* (welfare). As a result, children are taught that “working hard” is a way “to make something of themselves.”²⁷ In order to “make something” of oneself, one has to already be nothing. This mainstream perception of work is what makes someone something, and presumably this *something* is a status symbol, and non-workers, welfare receivers, are *nothing*. Furthermore, mainstream work serves a greater purpose than just making a living and distinguishing one from welfare. “It also constitutes a framework for daily behavior and patterns of interaction” as it “imposes disciplines and regularities.”²⁸ It is this discipline and regularity that is crucial in maintaining the structure of mainstream culture.

This organization and structure that is taught within the home is also reinforced within mainstream communities, where one is not only regulated by their work, but also by their neighbors.²⁹ Without this organization and structure, communities deviate from mainstream values, which results in lower-class behavior. As Wilson argues, “the failure of forces of social organization” leads to *ghetto-related*

²⁵ Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*: Univ of California Press, 4.

²⁶ Wilson 1987: 56 as cited in Newman 2002

²⁷ Anderson 1999: 38

²⁸ Wilson 1996: 73

²⁹ Wilson 1996: 71

practices (non-mainstream practices), such as “overt emphasis on sexuality” to occur.³⁰

The sixth and final mainstream value is cleanliness. In order to demonstrate commitment to hard work and industriousness, there is a *mainstream* desire to publicly portray one's *elite* status and wealth. Cleanliness is one way that this appears, as *elites* use cleanliness to portray their wealth and well-being. This aligns with the arguments of Bagwell and Bernheim who, following Thorstein Veblen, suggest, “wealthy individuals often consume highly conspicuous goods and services to advertise their wealth.”³¹

The desire to publicly display one's hard work and commitment to these values demonstrates the constant work and discipline required to maintain one's higher status. *Elites* demand social recognition of the hard work they put in. As a result, *elites* work to distance themselves from non-mainstream behaviors and they project their anxieties about these behaviors on to *white trash*.

Methods of Analysis

This thesis explores various forms of *white trash* discourse. To do so, I analyze newspaper and journal articles, films, shows, books, and academic journals that relate to *white trash*. The following are brief introductions to various works, each of which will be discussed in greater depth throughout this thesis.

Charles Murray is the author of the novel *Coming Apart* along with various articles, such as *The Coming Underclass* and *Prole Models*. He is a Moralistic and his

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bagwell, L. and Bernheim, B. 1996 “Veblen Effects in a Theory of Conspicuous Consumption.” *The American Economic Review* 86(3), 349.

work will often serve as representative of the Moralistic perspective, as he continuously reinforces the importance of mainstream values and despises *white trash*.

Idiocracy is a 2006 satirical film that portrays a world in which intelligence has drastically declined and society no longer places an emphasis on education.³² The film immediately marks its population as *white trash* by highlighting their lack of intelligence, wild sexual conduct, and lack of concern around filthiness.

Making a Murderer is a Netflix documentary series that chronicles the murder trials of Steven Avery and his nephew, Brendan Dassey. Both Avery and Dassey were portrayed as *white trash* throughout their court cases, and this influenced media's representation of the case.

The West Memphis 3 are three men who spent over eighteen years in prison after being falsely convicted of the rape, murder, and mutilation of three teen boys in 1993. Echols, the head of the group, is quoted as explaining that the three were portrayed as "poverty-stricken white trash."³³

Deliverance is a 1973 film that has won many Academy Awards and Golden Globes.³⁴ The film portrays a group of middle class men going on a simple, peaceful canoeing trip. When they reach the outskirts of town, they find a group of individuals who are clearly *white trash*, and these *white trash* individuals ultimately end up being portrayed as dirty, dumb, and antisocial.

³² "Plot Summary." *IMDB*. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0387808/plotsummary>

³³ Ramsey, William. (2012). *Abomination: Devil Worship and Deception in the West Memphis Three Murders*. Lexington, KY: William Ramsey.

³⁴ "Awards." *IMDB*. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068473/awards>

Here Comes Honey Boo Boo is a show that premiered on TLC in 2012.³⁵ The show depicts a young girl, Alana aka “Honey Boo Boo,” and her family. The family is perceived to be *white trash* and the discourse concerning Honey Boo Boo and her family demonstrates popular perceptions of *white trash*.

Pennsatucky is a character in *Orange is the New Black*, a Netflix comedy-series.³⁶ The show depicts the life inside a women's prison, and *Pennsatucky* is often cited as the *white trash* character.

In chapter one, I summarize the history of *white trash* as a reflection of *elite* anxieties and analyze the current media portrayal of *white trash*. For the rest of the thesis, I go through the life course of *white trash* as it relates to deviation from mainstream norms. Chapters two through seven analyze the six categories of mainstream values that are used to demarcate *white trash*: gender, sex, family, education, work and leisure, and cleanliness.

³⁵ “Honey Boo Boo.” *TVGuide*. Retrieved from <http://www.tvguide.com/tvshows/here-comes-honey-boo-boo/377027/>

³⁶ “Orange Is the New Black.” *IMDB*. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2372162/>

Chapter 1

What is White Trash?

White trash is a marker for what *whiteness* is not. As a result, the anxieties concerning *white trash* change over time to reflect what *whiteness* aims to distance itself from. This is apparent in the *white trash* discourse as it relates to racism. Initially, *white trash* was perceived to be *too* race-friendly, as can be seen in the following quote by Bayard Taylor. Post Civil War, however, the anxieties concerning *white trash* shifted and *white trash* served the role of the Racist.

In 1854, a famous public speaker and abolitionist, Bayard Taylor, explained that *white trash* people were "barbarians [who] seem to have united all the vices of the Negro with those of their own race."³⁷ The issue with poor whites was that they allegedly behaved like black slaves, who were perceived to be racially inferior, and this behavior by poor whites threatened the perception of whiteness as racially superior. Thirty years later during the Eugenics movement, one of the justifications of involuntary sterilization of *white trash* was their lack of concern for "upholding the color line."³⁸ These sexual relations and the resulting offspring were generally called "racial miscegenation," and this led to the Virginia Racial Integrity Law of 1924 that was used to "prohibit marriages between whites and nonwhites."³⁹ The concern regarding poor whites at the time was that they were too similar to non-whites and

³⁷ Wray, Matt. 2006. *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 82

³⁹ *Ibid.*

were reproducing with non-whites, ultimately threatening whiteness and potentially contaminating the gene pool.

Post-Civil War, *mainstream whites* attempted to assimilate past slaves into what they perceived as mainstream, proper behavior.⁴⁰ At the same time, these *whites* further disparaged *white trash*, as *white trash* had the past vices that were used to justify prejudice against slaves. This disparagement of *white trash* served as an example of the punishment for deviating from mainstream values, and it served to reinforce the notion that past slaves should assimilate to current norms. With that said, it is important to note that this discussion of the disparagement of *white trash* is by no means an effort to equate the experiences of *white trash* with those of racial minorities. Instead, it is presented as an example of how mainstream values worked, and still work, to distinguish between *traditional whites* and *white trash*.

Along with the further disparagement of *white trash* during this time came the perception of *white trash*, once *too* race-friendly, as racist. This is yet again an example of the *reformed sinner, whites*, working to distance themselves from their past sins, i.e. racism. The *reformed sinners* projected this racism onto *white trash*. This projection served to exonerate *whites* of their past crimes and portray *white trash* as inhumane and savage. The distinction between *white trash* as *too* race-friendly and the Racist is again not meant to belittle the real experiences of racial minorities nor is it meant to equate the experiences of *white trash* with those of racial minorities.

⁴⁰ Hartman, Saidiya V. 1997. *Scenes Of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press; Hoy, Suellen. 1995. *Chasing Dirt: the American Pursuit of Cleanliness*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Instead, this distinction between *white trash* as racist and *too* race-friendly is just a reflection of the role that *white trash* serves as a boundary marker.

Harper Lee depicts the role of *white trash* as the Racist in the novels, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (TKAM) received very positive reviews, being called a “beautifully crafted masterpiece” and a book that was meant to make you “feel.”⁴¹ The purpose of the book was clear: Post-Civil War, there was a need to call out the overt racism and prejudice in the American South. However, within this depiction of racism, Harper Lee was particularly calling attention to the racist behavior of *white trash*, as can be seen in the distinction between the Finch family and the Ewell family.

The novel depicts a white man, Atticus Finch, defending an African American man, Tom Robinson, who has been falsely accused of raping and beating a white woman, Mayella Ewell. Notice the important distinction that is immediately present: one character is the progressive, educated lawyer, Atticus Finch, and on other is the bigoted white woman, Mayella, who falsely accuses a black man of rape. It should be no surprise that the villains, Mayella Ewell and her family, are depicted as low-status whites and social outcasts.⁴²

The audience is first introduced to the Ewells on page twenty-nine of the novel, when the teacher panics about the cleanliness of one student, Burris Ewell, who was the “filthiest human I [the protagonist] have ever seen.” Burris is depicted as having a “neck [that] was dark gray, the backs of his hands were rusty, and his

⁴¹ 2015. "To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee-- review." *The Guardian*. Retrieved February 15, 2016 <http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/jul/17/to-kill-a-mockingbird-harper-lee-review>

⁴² Lee, H. (1960). *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.

fingernails were black deep into the quick.”⁴³ He is immediately marked as *white trash* by his dirty appearance, and this portrayal of the Ewells as *white trash* is used to depict the Ewells as terrible people.

In fact, the Ewells were so poorly perceived that Bob Ewell, the patriarch, was murdered at the end of the novel, and no one cared to address it. Michael Lind, author for *The Smart Set*, explains that in *TKAM*, “morality is correlated with class among the white characters.”⁴⁴ As a result, the death of the immoral Bob Ewell was no concern for anyone and reflects the same mentality that was common during the Eugenics movement of the early 20th century: there was a need to remove *white trash* from the gene pool, either through murder or sterilization.

On the other hand, Atticus Finch was a hero. Michiko Kakutani, author for the *The New York Times*, deemed him “the most potent moral force” in the novel’s protagonist’s life.⁴⁵ Furthermore, he was deemed: “kind, wise, honorable, an avatar of integrity who used his gifts as a lawyer to defend a black man.”⁴⁶ Harper Lee did in *To Kill a Mockingbird* exactly what *elite whites* were doing in real life: generate dialogue that opposes racism by projecting racist and prejudiced actions onto *white trash*.

It was this approach that allowed the novel to be so successful, as can be seen in reviews of Harper Lee’s most recent novel, *Go Set a Watchman*, which is closely tied to the events that occurred in Lee’s first novel. While Atticus Fitch was portrayed

⁴³ Both preceding quotes come from *Ibid.*, 29

⁴⁴ Lind, M. "White Trash Gothic." *The Smart Set*. February 16, 2015. Retrieved from <http://thesmartset.com/article02161501/>

⁴⁵ Kakutani, M. "Review: Harper Lee’s ‘Go Set a Watchman’ Gives Atticus Fitch A Dark Side." *NYTimes*. July 11, 2015 Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/11/books/review-harper-lee-go-set-a-watchman-gives-atticus-fitch-a-dark-side.html>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

as a moral hero in *TKAM*, *Go Set a Watchman* portrays him as racist, much to the surprise of the audience. This generated an immense amount of dialogue following the release of the novel. Maureen Corrigan, a writer for *National Public Radio*, released an article calling the novel a “mess that will forever change the way we read a masterpiece.”⁴⁷ In fact, *Go Set a Watchman* was marketed as a sequel, but critics call it a “radically different draft” as opposed to a sequel.⁴⁸ This draft is a “mess” because the racist actions are not limited to *white trash*. The novel calls attention to *elite white* prejudice and discrimination, and mainstream culture is not ready for that.

A Brief History

Low-status whites have always been marked as social deviants in America. The terms for *white trash* have slightly changed over time to reflect *mainstream* anxieties of the given time period. However, these terms have all served a similar function in differentiating between *mainstream* whites and white deviants, i.e. *white trash*. A brief summary of the previous terms and anxieties will introduce the concerns that are still present today and used to identify *white trash*.

In his novel *Not Quite White*, Matt Wray explains that the term *Lubber*, one of the earliest terms for marking white deviants, reflected whites that “held deep aversions to morality and work.”⁴⁹ They were particularly viewed as opposing the early values depicted by William Bird: “industriousness and hard work, religiosity

⁴⁷ Corrigan, M. “Harper Lee’s ‘Watchman’ Is A Mess That Makes US Reconsider A Masterpiece.” *NPR*. July 13, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2015/07/13/422545987/harper-lee-watchman-is-a-mess-that-makes-us-reconsider-a-masterpiece>

⁴⁸ Ulin, D. “Harper Lee’s ‘Go Set a Watchman’ reveals a darker side of Maycomb.” *LATimes*. July 11, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-jc-harper-lee-go-set-a-watchman-review20150711-story.html#page=1>

⁴⁹ Wray 2006: 26

and good Christian practice, and cleanliness and health as hallmarks of an upright life.”⁵⁰ Thus, hard work was initially linked to morality.

However, as time went on, the absence of work became more than just a moral concern, as it also led to criminal behavior. This led to the development of the term *Cracker*, which was used to highlight the new virtues of "criminality and lawfulness.”⁵¹ The sins of the *Lubbers* and *Crackers* were the same: they did not want to obey the rules set forth by the upper class and work relentlessly. However, *Crackers* were particularly threatening as they did not care about laws expecting them to be “hardworking,” and they “lacked access to the land needed for social mobility,” so they just “pushed aggressively and violently into the western trans-Appalachia frontier.”⁵²

The threat of *Cracker* criminality posed a serious threat to the material possessions of the wealthy landowners. Because industriousness was a virtue, one would need to demonstrate his hard work and status through material possessions. *Crackers* rejected this entire notion of hard work and would instead steal what they needed and pushed "aggressively" to take control over the land that they otherwise would not get.

Then, around 1840, appeared the term that is popular today: *white trash*. This term was largely synonymous with its predecessors *Lubber* and *Cracker* in that *white trash* people were marked for not working hard. *White trash* differed largely in that it was a character present all over the US, as opposed to being perceived as a Southern

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 34

⁵² Ibid.

poor white. Similarly, this nationalization brought upon a critical perception of *white trash*: pity.

Attitudes towards *white trash* were binary: either of disgust or pity. For example, the term *poor white trash* was popularized in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She referred to *white trash* as a “poor white population as degraded and brutal as ever existed in any of the most crowded districts of Europe.”⁵³ However, Stowe did not blame *white trash*. She blamed the Southern economic and political system for generating a low-status group; she pitied *white trash*. On the other hand Bayard Taylor, the “most famous public speaker of this era,” described *poor white trash* as “the most depraved class of whites I have ever seen. Idle shiftless, filth in their habits, aggressive, with no regard for the rights of others.”⁵⁴

While the portrayal of low-status whites shifted as Defenders began to blame societal and economic factors, there was no disagreement in core values: industriousness and productivity. Either *white trash* chose not to work or they could not work, but the issue was the same: not working. As a result, Wray says, there remained an agreement on three factors: *white trash* are “socially and culturally different,” “cultural degenerates,” and a “social problem that needed to be addressed.”⁵⁵

Wray particularly highlights the role of novels like Stowe's that nationalized the term *white trash*, but there was also a physical movement of low-status whites to

⁵³ Ibid., 58

⁵⁴ Ibid., 60

⁵⁵ Ibid., 63

more industrial locations in a move called the "Appalachian Migration"⁵⁶ that led *white trash* to become a national concern. For instance, the construction of the term *hillbilly* occurred as a result of the Appalachian Migration. One author, Norma Lee Browning, documented the new appearance of the *hillbillies*, explaining that authorities perceived them as "bottom of the heap, socially, morally, mentally and at the top of those migrant 'undesirables' contributing to the city's increased crime rate."⁵⁷ The "southern hillbilly migrants" had "the lowest standard of living and moral code of all."⁵⁸ The new mainstream qualities used to mark *white trash*, in addition to industriousness and criminality, became "self-pride and responsibility," which these "southern migrants" were "completely devoid of."⁵⁹ Furthermore, the issue was not only the lack of traditional values, but the "hill people" were "staunch and immovable as the hills themselves,"⁶⁰ they did not want to conform. They were perceived as unwilling to assimilate to *elite* culture.

During the Appalachian Migration, the *white trash*, who originated as Southern low-status whites, became fully nationalized. Over time, the anxieties concerning deviant behavior became increasingly more coded. However, there was still a need to create a boundary between *mainstream whites* and low-status whites to allow *elites* to maintain their status, so this happened over time through the use of mainstream values as markers of *mainstream* or *other*.

⁵⁶ Obermiller, Phillip, Chad Berry, Roger Guy, J. Trent Alexander, William Philliber, Michael Maloney, and Bruce Tucker. "Major Turning Points: Rethinking Appalachian Migration." *Appalachian Journal* 36(3): 164-187.

⁵⁷ Browning, Norma. 1957. "Girl Reporter Visits Jungles of Hillbillies." *Chicago Tribune*.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Furthermore, as the work done by Wray shows, there are many terms to identify low-status whites. These terms have subtle changes and regional differences, but largely serve the same purpose as markers of white deviants. Thus, for the purpose of this work, low-status white labels, such as *redneck*, *hillbilly*, *poor white trash*, and *white trash* will be used synonymously as they each target the same mainstream values. Similarly, *white trash* counterparts will be referred to as both *mainstream whites* and *elite whites* as these terms serve the same role in being the antithesis to *white trash* and the model *white*.

White Trash Today: Fearing the Underclass

While the discourse around mainstream values largely focuses on the use of these values as a means of distinguishing whites from other races, there is no doubt that these same values are used within whiteness to mark white deviants. However, this does not equate the experiences of *white trash* and other subordinate groups. Instead, it is just another way in which these values are used to distinguish between different groups.

One of the most popular writers of the fear around the rise in *white trash* culture and deviance from mainstream norms is Charles Murray. In a 1993 post in *The Wall Street Journal*, Murray expresses a deep concern about the rise in the “white underclass,” or *white trash*, which he categorizes as a population with “poverty, most illegitimate children, most women on welfare, most unemployed men, and most arrests for serious crimes.”⁶¹ This characterization of the white underclass is similar to the “ghetto-related” practices that Wilson cites as having “overt sexuality, idleness,

⁶¹ Murray, C. “The Coming White Underclass.” *The Wall Street Journal*. October 29, 2013.

and public drinking,”⁶² suggesting that Wilson’s argument holds true for *white trash* as well.

Because underclass, and the subsequent discourse around the underclass's deviance from the mainstream, is often just another euphemism for race, Murray explains that whites also have an underclass. However, this "white underclass" has not been prominent in recent discourse "because the whites who might qualify have been scattered among the working class.”⁶³ Murray warns, however, that once the *white trash* population has reached a specific point, the culture will negatively influence society. *White trash* is currently dispersed enough that their culture is not yet contagious, but he warns that white illegitimacy rates will soon reach a “problematic 25%” range and will shift the “trendlines of crime, labor force, and illegitimacy.”⁶⁴

Murray also targets education as an area threatened by *white trash*: “The white underclass will begin to show its face in isolated ways. Look for certain schools in white neighborhoods to get a reputation as being unteachable, with large numbers of disruptive students and indifferent parents.”⁶⁵ Education is another method of socializing the next generation, and Murray warns of an incoming group that is “unteachable” and thus unwilling to be socialized. Murray is highlighting four areas as social threats of the underclass: education, illegitimacy, unemployment, and welfare.

⁶² Wilson 1996

⁶³ Murray, C. “The Coming White Underclass.” *The Wall Street Journal*. October 29, 2013.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Murray further expands on these threats through his depiction of Fishtown in his novel *Coming Apart*. Fishtown is a pseudonym for a town that is primarily composed of poor whites. Murray describes how the rise of the underclass of Fishtown influences the greater society as illegitimacy rates rise and employment rates decrease. His fear is that *white trash* culture, like that of Fishtown, is contagious and threatens to destroy the current mainstream culture.⁶⁶

In a review of Murray's book, Nicholas Kristof, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and many other humanitarian awards,⁶⁷ disagrees with "the important parts" of Murray's work that critique "liberal social policies."⁶⁸ However, even a liberal like Kristof defends Murray's concerns surrounding the rise in the white underclass and threat of mainstream values. He explains that working-class Americans are "being calcified into an underclass" and explains that there needs to be even more social policy to stop this.⁶⁹ His perception of the white underclass is similarly "marked by drugs, despair, family decline, high incarceration rates and a diminishing role of jobs and education as escalators of upward mobility."⁷⁰ Kristof's depiction of *white trash* is upholding mainstream values as genuine social markers. By doing this, Kristof is dismissing any discussion of a counter-culture and only further creates a discussion about *white trash* that can be clearly divided into the two recurring categories: either directly opposing *white trash* behavior (Moralists) or pitying it (Defender).

⁶⁶ Murray, Charles A. 2012. *Coming Apart: the State of White America, 1960-2010*. New York, NY: Crown Forum.

⁶⁷ "Nicholas Kristof." *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/column/nicholas-kristof?action=click&contentCollection=Opinion&module=ExtendedByline®ion=Header&pgtype=article>

⁶⁸ Kristof, N. 2012. "The White Underclass." *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/09/opinion/kristof-the-decline-of-white-workers.html>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Media Portrayal of White Trash

There is a constant desire to create a boundary between mainstream whites and low-status whites to allow *elites* to maintain their status, and this boundary is upheld through media representations of *white trash*.

One example of the media portrayal of *white trash* is *Deliverance*, both the 1970 novel and the 1972 film, which received incredibly high reviews and was called “a true classic” and “excellence delivered.”⁷¹ In what Dennis Miller, a writer for *The Huffington Post*, calls a “novel about survival,” *Deliverance* depicts the experience of “four Atlanta suburbanites” and the assault on them by “a couple of sodomy-inclined *hillbillies*.”⁷² Here, *Deliverance* is directly contrasting the innocent, explorative suburbanite from the invasive, threatening *hillbilly* that ultimately murders and rapes the suburbanite. Newt explains that movies like *Deliverance* serve as a “source of realistic and fantastical menace to white middle class tourists,”⁷³ demonstrating that people believe these films to be “realistic.” Films like *Deliverance* carry a strong message warning against *white trash*, and this message is well received and trusted.

Deliverance provides a perfect example of how film and media portray low-status whites as physically threatening to mainstream culture. While *Deliverance* is just one example of this, there is an entire subgroup of horror films, “*Hillbilly* and *Redneck Horror*,” such as *Evil Dead 2*, *Wrong Turn*, and *Hills Have Eyes*,⁷⁴ that highlight *hillbillies* and *white trash* as cannibals, murderers, and rapists.

⁷¹ “Reviews and Ratings for Deliverance.” *IMDB*. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068473/reviews>

⁷² Miller, D. “15 Novels About Survival.” *The Huffington Post*. February 19, 2016. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dennis-miller/15-novels-about-survival_b_9150494.html

⁷³ In Wray, 2006: 134

⁷⁴ Horroronscreen, R. “Top 10 Hillbillies and Redneck Horror.” *Moviepilot*. May 2, 2014. Retrieved from <http://moviepilot.com/posts/1395420>:

Interestingly, these movies, along with many TV shows, such as *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, have been deemed “hixploitation.” Hixploitation is a combination of the terms “hicks” and “exploitation,” arguing that movies and shows about *white trash* culture are exploitative.⁷⁵ Kevin Fallon, a journalist for *The Daily Beast*, calls for the ending of reality TV’s “hixploitation.”⁷⁶ He explains that “reality TV has always been branded empty calories” but now “these calories aren’t just empty anymore. They are poisoned. They are making us sick. And we’re complicit in our ruin.”⁷⁷ Fallon's argument is similar to that of Murray's: Fallon fears that *white trash* culture is contagious, and the current portrayal of this culture is so enticing that it poses a serious threat to the standing of mainstream culture.

Furthermore, he claims the shows were “supposed to save us all” because they trumpeted the “importance of family, religion, and love.”⁷⁸ However, after watching a few episodes, it was clear that shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* were not reflective of traditional family values and were not going to “save” mainstream values. As a result, this “hixploitation” has led to the recurring two distinct, yet not so different, perspectives.

On one hand, the Moralists view “hixploitative” films and media portrayal of *white trash* as trash. However, this media representation allows for the “redemption of innocence” by showing *mainstream whites* as the victims and *white trash* as villains. Thus, *elites* both despise and love this media, as the media reflects the *trashy* behavior (and the guilty pleasures of the *elite*) that the *elites* “despise,” yet it also

⁷⁵ Fallon, K. “The Duggar Effect: The End of Hicksploitation TV.” *The Daily Beast*. May 28, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/05/28/the-duggar-effect-the-end-of-hixploitation-tv.html>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

allows *elites* to portray themselves as the victims, again exonerating themselves of their past sins. The *elite* appear as the *reformed sinners* and *white trash* are a personification of the *elite*'s guilty pleasures/past sins. This explains why movies like *Deliverance* and shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* are mostly watched by *elites*; they love to hate it.

On the other hand, there are *elites* who come to defend *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and other well-known *white trash* media by claiming that the characters/actors are being “exploited.” However, exploitation only makes sense if one believes in a social hierarchy that places traditional values at the top. In which case, these two perspectives are not all that different. If, on the other hand, one believes in the plausibility of a counter-culture that is not dependent on traditional values and is not perceived to be lower on the social ladder, then these shows are not exploitative at all; they are the reality of an “other.”

This discourse of the “exploitative” media that depicts *white trash* is another enforcer of *mainstream* values. The critics of *white trash* blatantly recognize the *white trash* deviation from the *mainstream*. *White trash* Defenders only reinforce *mainstream* values as necessary and attempt to hide deviation from these values. Thus, this “exploitative” discourse is a mask for endorsing *mainstream* values, and much of the *white trash* discourse uses a mask to cover their real intentions.

The Meth Mask

“ I think the worst drug I’ve ever done. I did Crystal Meth once.”

“Oh my god, you did Crystal Meth?”

“Because someone told me it was coke!”

“White trash! . . . All of a sudden, you lost three teeth! Haha”

-Comedians Josh Wolf, Chelsea Handler, and Fortune Feister on *Chelsea Does*⁷⁹

The discourse surrounding meth use is an excellent example of *white trash* discourse that uses a moral panic to mask their real intention: to target potential deviant behaviors. Meth is often depicted as a *white trash* drug and used as a marker for *white trash*. However, analysis of the discussions about meth as a *white trash* drug shows that meth is not the concern, but rather a mask covering up the real anxieties concerning *white trash* culture.

The above quote comes from an episode of *Chelsea Does* that is dedicated to drug use and its effects. The quote depicts how meth is commonly associated with *white trash*. In this scene, Chelsea Handler and a few other comedians are sitting at a table enjoying a luxurious meal while high on marijuana. The scene is used to introduce an episode dedicated to drug use and its effects. Despite portraying most drugs positively, the episode immediately distances meth away from other, higher-status drugs, such as marijuana, mushrooms, and acid. When comedian Josh Wolf reveals that he has tried meth once, the rest of the comedians express shock and laugh at him, deeming him *white trash*.⁸⁰ Even in discourse meant to support drug use, meth is portrayed as unacceptable due to its low status. Its use by an *elite* was purely accidental, as it was mistaken for cocaine, an *elite* drug. As reflected in this episode,

⁷⁹ In Netflix documentary series *Chelsea Does*: episode 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

meth use is mocked and unacceptable, not because it is a drug, but because it is a *white trash* drug.

Meth has been used as a proxy for poor white people, particularly *white trash*. The particular emphasis on *white trash* and meth use serves as a reflection of more than meth use itself, as the dialogue around *white trash* meth use is used to target deviance from cultural norms that stand separate from biological and medical concerns.

Previous literature has prioritized discussing meth as a moral panic in an effort to disprove some of the biological and medical concerns around meth use. However, this research on meth as a moral panic also reveals the cultural norms embedded in meth discussions that reveal many of the elite anxieties concerning *white trash*. As described by Armstrong, moral panic occurs through a series of five steps.⁸¹ The first step is a “heightened level of concern” which occurred in January 2005, when the Senate introduced the Combat Meth Act.⁸² Next, moral panics lead to hostility towards people responsible, which is reflected in the hostility towards *white trash*.⁸³ Then, there is a public consensus that the threat is real, and that threat is then far removed from any objective measure of seriousness, as can be seen by the use of meth as a mask to target *white trash* for deviating from *mainstream* culture. Finally, there is volatility around the target of the moral panic, and the volatility of the

⁸¹ Armstrong, Edward G. 2007. “Moral Panic Over Meth.” *Contemporary Justice Review* 10(4):427–42; Goode, E. 1994. “Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, And Social Construction.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 20(1): 149–71.

⁸² Armstrong 2007

⁸³ Ibid.

methamphetamine fear is shown through three previous "moral panics" prior to this time.⁸⁴

Thus, meth is a moral panic, and it is this moral panic that has aided in meth serving as a proxy for *white trash*. Past research around meth has prioritized proving meth as a moral panic to bring to question meth use as it relates to addiction, medical issues, and child welfare. However, these concerns are not the same concerns used to depict *white trash*, as so often happens with moral panics, as the objective threat of the target (meth) loses seriousness. I aim to expand on the work of Armstrong and others by highlighting the key anxieties concerning meth and framing meth as it relates to core American values.

Furthermore, this research on meth as a moral panic argues that meth is either a moral panic or a serious epidemic,⁸⁵ but these two are not mutually exclusive, as meth may be both. An epidemic is defined as "a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time"⁸⁶ with disease being defined as "a particular abnormal condition, a disorder of a structure or function that affects part or all of an organism."⁸⁷ I argue that meth discourse reveals anxieties around a potential widespread abnormal culture (similar to Murray's concern of contagious culture), and its presence threatens the current structure of the social hierarchy maintained by the *elite*. It is this potential epidemic that portrays meth as a rebellion against the current dominant structure that is reliant on cultural values to perpetuate

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ In *Oxford Dictionaries*. Retrieved from http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/epidemic

⁸⁷ "Disease." *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disease>

the high standing of certain groups, and it is the potential resistance of cultural expectations that generates *elite* anxiety and the *white trash* moral panic.

Chapter 2: The Perfect Woman

A Case Study on Tonya Harding as the *White Trash* Woman



*Tonya Harding (left) and Nancy Kerrigan in February 1994*⁸⁸

One of the earliest concerns around *white trash* behavior in America was their alleged defiance of traditional gender norms. In fact, *Lubber*, the earlier term for poor whites, was heavily gendered and targeted primarily men for allowing women to work.⁸⁹ In the early nineteenth century, it was the expectation that men would work and women would take care of the home and family, and *white trash's* divergence from this behavior led to public contempt and shaming of the group.⁹⁰ However, move forward two centuries and as norms have changed, the anxieties surrounding *white trash* has changed as well; now *white trash* are stereotyped as being sexist for attempting to maintain the same behavior *elite whites* challenged them for defying two centuries prior.⁹¹ Many of these sexist expectations are still in tact and *white*

⁸⁸ Craig Strong/AFP/Getty; Chris Cole/Allsport/Getty; Jones. January 6, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20772550,00.html>

⁸⁹ Wray 2006

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *White trash* are often marked as sexist. One example can be seen in Shippers, M. "We're Right to Criticize Phil Robertson, But Why So Quick to Let A&E Off the Hook?" *The Huffington Post*. December 22, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mimi-schippers-phd/duck-dynasty-class_b_4488772.html

trash is condemned for challenging them, such as the role of the man and woman within a family.

A more recent account of the sexist construction of *white trash* can be seen through the analysis of attitudes towards Tonya Harding in the late 1990s. Tanya Harding was a well-known figure skating champion, who was one of the biggest rivals of Nancy Kerrigan, arguably the best figure skater of her time. Both Kerrigan and Harding shared a low-income background, but the perceptions of the two were drastically different. Harding was described as the antithesis of Kerrigan, who "came to embody all the qualities that Tonya would never quite be able to grasp," as Kerrigan was "elegant and patrician despite her working-class background."⁹² Here, Sarah Marshall, whose article defending Harding became well known, uses the word "despite" to suggest that working-class background is not elegant and patrician, as these are qualities that need to be learned and worked on, reflective of an *elite* culture.

Kerrigan was willing to conform to mainstream values and traditional notions of beauty and femininity. As a result, she was absolutely adored. On the other hand, Harding's background was stereotypically *white trash* as she "grew up hunting and fishing, at one point living in a trailer park, she smoked cigarettes, and (she) spoke her mind."⁹³ Harding was clearly not feminine enough for skating and thus despised. This difference in perceptions of Kerrigan and Harding demonstrates that *white trash* is more than just a poor white person. *White trash* is instead a *poor white* that will not

⁹² Marshall, S. "Remote Control Tonya Harding, Nancy Kerrigan, and The Spectacles of Female Power and Pain." *Believer Mag*. January 2014. Retrieved from http://www.believermag.com/issues/201401/?read=article_marshall

⁹³ Davidson, K. 2014. "Tonya Harding's Still a Brat Two Decades Later." *Bloomberg View*. January 6, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-01-06/tonya-harding-s-still-a-brat-two-decades-later>

conform to mainstream values; Kerrigan is a *poor white* that the Defenders could save/assimilate; Harding apparently was not.

Kerrigan was willing to put in the work necessary to assimilate to *elite* culture. She got her teeth fixed, and was "beautiful without being sexual, strong without being intimidating and vulnerable without being weak."⁹⁴ Harding, on the other hand, was just "greasy" and her entire existence was perceived to be *anti-elite* as "her mother had been married six times to six different men, or maybe seven" and "she drank beer and played pool and smoked even though she had asthma."⁹⁵

Harding was an amazing figure skater, but she was not the traditional woman. These two characteristics were perceived to be synonymous and Harding's lack of femininity apparently posed a threat to the standards of the traditional figure skater as it relates to the traditional woman. In a sport that actually measures gracefulness and other *elite* values, Harding was able to succeed, even though she did not conform. She was able to beat the *elites* at their own game, and that was terrifying for the *elite*.

As a result, Kerrigan was widely known as a fan favorite and Harding was perceived to be plain old dirty *white trash*. When Kerrigan was physically assaulted right before the United States Figure Skating Championship, Evy Scovfield, Kerrigan's old coach, immediately assumed it was Tonya Harding.⁹⁶ Scovfield's opinion was not a minority, as many people thought that Harding was guilty based on

⁹⁴ Marshall, S. "Remote Control Tonya Harding, Nancy Kerrigan, and The Spectacles of Female Power and Pain." *Believer Mag*. January 2014. Retrieved from http://www.believermag.com/issues/201401/?read=article_marshall

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ In *30 For 30: The Price of Gold*. 2014.

her *white trash* background. Her lack of femininity and her lack of conformity to traditional roles led to her portrayal as "the skating world's perfect villain."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Gray, E. "What We Missed About The Nancy Kerrigan-Tonya Harding Scandal 20 Years Ago." *The Huffington Post*. January 10, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/emma-gray/nancy-kerrigan-tonya-harding-the-price-of-gold_b_4578036.html

Chapter 3

Sexual Deviance

Yes, Doggett was once a toothless close-minded, Bible-thumper--but not that we've learned all about her troubled past and her history of sexual abuse... and cringed at her present-day rape... we have a much more complete picture of what makes her tick.

Jen Trolio, *Vox Culture*, 2015⁹⁸

Pennsatucky is a perfect example of the perceptions of *white trash sex*.

Initially a villain, Pennsatucky began to receive sympathy by viewers after the writers of *Orange is the New Black* revealed more about her character's past. One of the concerns surrounding Pennsatucky was that she was willing to utilize sex as a tool to acquire what she wanted, such as meth. She was perceived as just a "*white trash meth head*,"⁹⁹ but after finding out that Pennsatucky had been raped, viewer perceptions of her changed. Rather than viewing her negatively for utilizing sex to her advantage, viewers were able to rationalize her promiscuity as a result of her past sexual assault. Pennsatucky was labeled as *white trash* and her only redemption was to place the behavior out of her control, allowing Defenders to again rationalize *white trash* deviance from mainstream norms.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Trolio, J. "Orange Is the New Black has finally humanized Pennsatucky. It is about time." *Vox Culture*. July 1, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.vox.com/2015/7/1/8873101/orange-is-the-new-black-pennsatucky-doggett>

⁹⁹ Bernstein, A. "Pennsatucky's redemption: How 'Orange Is the New Black' pulled a reverse 'Breaking Bad.'" *Salon*. June 20, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2015/06/20/pennsatuckys_redemption_how_orange_is_the_new_black_pulled_a_reverse_breaking_bad/

¹⁰⁰ Etkin, J. "Behind the Most Heartbreaking Backstory In 'Orange Is The New Black' Season 3." *Buzzfeed*. June 23, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.buzzfeed.com/jaimieetkin/behind-pennsatuckys-heartbreaking-evolution-in-orange-is-the#.ikPyVB4qLJ>

Andrew Sullivan explains that the sole purpose of mainstream sex is "marital, loving, and procreative."¹⁰¹ Thus, mainstream sex has two purposes: loving, marital sex that involves commitment to one's significant other and procreative sex that leads to a child. Both of these purposes link sex to the family, but *white trash sex* is particularly concerning in that it not only avoids committal, married sex, but also occurs outside of any intention to start a family. However, there is no concrete anxiety in relation to *white trash sex* as *white trash* is often used as a marker for whatever non-traditional sex the author wants to address at the time.

For instance, Murray explains that *white trash sex* is as simple as "sleeping with one's boyfriend."¹⁰² However, in another case, Charlotte Hays, journalist for the *New York Post*, explains that, "pre-*white trash*, physical intimacy was reserved to private places."¹⁰³ Physical intimacy that was public, then, is *white trash* intimacy. These behaviors are presumably a guilty pleasure of the *elite* as both authors are concerned that the general public will increasingly view these behaviors as acceptable; the authors fear that tempting the *reformed sinner* with his past sins will lead to a relapse.

Thus, Hays fears that children who see these public displays of sex will be able to explain to their parents the meaning of "Honey, I'm a Ho" or "Transsexuals Attack."¹⁰⁴ She is arguing that sex is something that should be earned, not given. With time and maturity, children can be exposed to proper forms of sex. However, if exposed too early, children will start having sex, but not middle class heterosexual

¹⁰¹ Sullivan 1995:101

¹⁰² Murray, C. "Prole Models." *The Wall Street Journal*. February 6, 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.aei.org/publication/prole-models/print/>

¹⁰³ Hays, C. "When did white trash become normal?" *New York Post*. November 11, 2012. Retrieved from <http://nypost.com/2013/11/02/when-did-white-trash-become-normal/>

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

sex within a committed relationship. Instead, they'll engage in non-standard sex, such as sex with various partners, "ho" sex, or sex with gender non-conforming individuals. Hays argues for the discipline and restraint that is so deeply connected to mainstream values, and she fears that the potentially contagious culture of *white trash* will lead to a decline in these values. Thus, all non-traditional sexual behaviors are classified as *white trash sex*.

Eugenics

Elites have policed *white trash sex* for many decades. For example, the Eugenics movement of the late nineteenth century led to a heightened concern surrounding *white trash* sexual behaviors. This movement aimed to understand, genetically, why one would differ from mainstream culture, and was largely connected to the publication of *The Jukes* by Richard Dugdale in 1877.¹⁰⁵ Dugdale was interested in what genetic traits led to criminality, and after finding that six poor white people in jail were related in some way, Dugdale hypothesized that divergence from traditional norms was a genetic trait that could be passed along. *White trash sex* became tied to anxieties concerning the reproduction of *white trash* culture through perceived "bad genes."

These viewpoints led to the creation of laws that allowed doctors to sterilize women with "mental defectives" in order to prevent the "feeble-minded" from passing along negative traits.¹⁰⁶ However, "mental defectives" was broadly defined, allowing immorality to be included in the traits representing "mental defectives." This

¹⁰⁵ In Wray 2006

¹⁰⁶ Wray 2006: 85

allowed *white trash* to be sterilized for deviating from committal sex or for being uneducated as a means of keeping the gene pool clean of *white trash* culture.

These involuntary sterilization laws were upheld after Buck V. Bell in 1926. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes ruled, "it is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. Three generations of imbeciles are enough."¹⁰⁷ Holmes was arguing for the regulation of *white trash* sex in an effort to prevent *white trash* offspring. The hatred towards *white trash* was so strong that Holmes was confident that they would be executed anyways for "crime," so policing sex was just a way of killing them early.

Incest



*Billy Redden as "Lonnie" in the 1972 iconic Georgia film "Deliverance"*¹⁰⁸

The regulating of *white trash sex* during the Eugenics movement is similar to the criminalization of incest, which is a marker for *white trash*. For instance, in

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 68

¹⁰⁸ Colley, L. "Lonnie was faking: a look back at 'Dueling Banjos.'" *AJC*. August 12, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.ajc.com/news/entertainment/look-back-dueling-banjos/mnHWN/>

Deliverance, the outsiders are immediately identified as sexual deviants and *white trash*, and one of these markers is a young boy, Lonnie. Lonnie never speaks, as his role is solely to look like the product of incest and serve as an indication of *white trash*. In fact, one of the only lines referencing Lonnie in the entire movie is “talk about genetic deficiencies. Isn’t it pitiful?”

Lonnie plays a “banjo duel” with one of the main characters and this scene, and arguably Lonnie’s role in the movie, is solely to instill fear. Lonnie is mysterious and refuses to shake the hand of the main character; the *white trash* are unwilling to conform to *elite* standards and cultural norms. As a result, Lonnie was awarded the title of the “creepiest kid in movie and TV”¹⁰⁹ and titled the “creepy banjo kid.”¹¹⁰ As a character that never speaks and only plays the banjo for a mere four minutes, his character being deemed “creepy” is solely dependent on his relation to incest, and this incest is meant to foreshadow what happens later in the movie—rape.

However, incest is not automatically a result of rape or a precursor of rape. With deeper analysis, in fact, it becomes unclear what the moral panic around incest actually stems from. In 2013, when discussing gay marriage, the governor of Pennsylvania compared gay marriage to the marriage between a brother and a sister.¹¹¹ In response, Ted Martin, Executive Director of *Equality Pennsylvania*, stated, “Gov. Corbett’s statements are shocking and hurtful to thousands of gay and lesbian couples who are doing the hard work of building strong families all across the

¹⁰⁹ EW Staff. “The Creepiest Kids in Movies and TV.” January 22, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.ew.com/gallery/18-creepy-movietv-kids>

¹¹⁰ TMZ Staff. “CREEPY BANJO KID in ‘Deliverance’ ‘Mamba Him?!’” December 9, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.tnz.com/2008/12/09/creepy-banjo-kid-in-delivrance-memba-him/>

¹¹¹ Muskal, M. “Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett compares gay marriage to incest.” *Los Angeles Times*. October 4, 2013. Retrieved <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/oct/04/nation/la-na-nn-pennsylvania-tom-corbett-gay-marriage-incest-20131004>

commonwealth. Gov. Corbett’s comments aren’t simply offensive; they are out of touch.”¹¹² Similarly, Mark Aronchick, the lead prosecutor who aided in arguing for Pennsylvania to lift its gay marriage ban, responded, “He’s (Corbett) just out of touch on this one. Gay people marry for the same reasons straight people do — to express their love and to declare their commitment before friends and family.”¹¹³ Aronchick and Corbett do not attempt to argue why incest is bad; instead, they are arguing that queer people are just like normal, mainstream Americans. Even liberal, progressive queer rights activists demonize incest, essentially further attacking *white trash*. In order to achieve their goals, they must remove any relation between queer people and *white trash*. They draw connections between queer people and mainstream culture, such as claiming that queer people and *mainstream* both “express love and declare commitment,” while still creating an *Other*: the noncommittal, the sexual deviants, the *white trash*.

Furthermore, there is a potential product of incest: children, which Lonnie is a clear representation of. Media outlets highlight incest as gross by depicting children who are products of incest as weird looking and acting. However, children who are born as a result of incestuous intercourse must not be the sole *elite* anxiety surrounding incest, as all forms of incest, such as oral sex, anal sex, hand jobs, mutual masturbation, and not just unprotected coitus, are marked immoral and inappropriate. In fact, incest is outlawed in many states, reflecting another moral panic around nontraditional sex. Thus, the concerns regarding incest must be a panic used to

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Pennsylvania governor Tom Corbett likens gay marriage to incest.” *Associated Press*. October 4, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/04/pennsylvania-governor-gay-marriage-incest>

reproduce traditional perceptions of sexuality. Like meth, incest is a panic that is connected to *white trash* to further disparage this group while attempting to portray traditional whites, who abide by *mainstream sex*, as *elite*.

Sexual Deviants as Rapists

Incest as an indicator of *white trash* culture has also been seen in *Making a Murderer*. In this series, Steven Avery is perceived to many as guilty solely as a result of his *white trash* status. Avery is portrayed as a sexual deviant, and thus a rapist. For example, Elizabeth Brown states in one of her articles, “community members suspected the worst of the Averys, including incest and other sexual deviance. Their low social status and country ways were more or less all the proof that neighbors needed.”¹¹⁴ Even defenders of Avery, such as Brown, view incest as “the worst,” and it is these behaviors that link a man to murder. The message is subtle but clear: earn your right to mainstream sex or be deemed a sexual deviant, which makes you a rapist.

This portrayal of Avery as *white trash* and thus a rapist is frequent in *Making a Murderer*. In episode ten of the series, the audience is introduced to Mr. O’ Kelly, an investigator hired by Brendan’s attorney, whose goal was supposed to defend Brendan and the Averys. However, O’Kelly only reiterates Avery’s status as *white trash* and equates him with vicious sexual misconduct. A statement from Mr. O’ Kelly included the following:

¹¹⁴ Brown, E. “How *Making a Murderer* Helps Explain Liberals’ Reaction to the Oregon Standoff.” *Reason*. January 6, 2016. Retrieved from <http://reason.com/blog/2016/01/06/making-a-murderer-and-malheur-militia>

A friend of mine suggested this is a one branch family tree. Cut this tree down. These are criminals. There are members engaged in sexual activities with nieces, nephews, and in-laws. Customers and or their relatives unwittingly become victims of their sexual fantasies. This is truly where the devil resides in comfort. I can find no good in any member. These people are pure evil. End the gene pool here.¹¹⁵

Mr. O' Kelly, a supposed defender of the Avery family, attacks the Avery family's sexual deviance, and uses this nonconformity to demonize the family as "pure evil." He describes the family as "a one branch family tree," highlighting that not only do they participate in incestuous relationships, but they are also products of incest. He suggests that anyone who engages in these behaviors must also be sexual predators and rapists, and the entire community is subject to being "victims of their sexual fantasies." Mr. O' Kelly used no evidence to support claiming Avery as a rapist or murderer, as Avery's background as *white trash* and alleged participation in incest seemed to be enough. However, these are not just malicious comparisons made by an investigator. An entire jury sentenced Avery to prison for a rape that he did not commit.

Furthermore, this connection between *white trash*, non-traditional sex, and the resulting assumption of rape is seen in other cases. For example, The West Memphis Three were classified as *white trash* and were wrongfully convicted of raping, murdering, and mutilating the bodies of three young boys. They were described as "in a league with Satan, and involved with homosexual orgies, blood drinking, and devil worshipping."¹¹⁶ Their role as *white trash* automatically titled them sexual deviants, linking them to homosexual orgies and blood drinking. Furthermore, the portrayal of

¹¹⁵ This quote can be found in *Making a Murderer*, episode 10.

¹¹⁶ Robinson, B. A. "The Robin Hood Hills murderer(s)." *Religious Tolerance*. 1997. Retrieved from http://www.religioustolerance.org/ra_robi2.htm

The West Memphis Three as sexual deviants was used as evidence by the media to portray them as rapists.

The portrayal of *white trash* as alleged rapists is a method used to target *white trash's* lack of committed sex, but more importantly to target their desire for immediate gratification, which is defiant of the discipline and regulation that serves as the core of *elite* values. Murray explains that an "unsocialized adolescent male," i.e. *white trash*, normalizes "immediate gratification and predatory sex."¹¹⁷ Murray is arguing that immediate gratification is a sin and through socialization, *white trash* can learn the importance of committed sex as opposed to noncommittal sex. This is just another occurrence of the *reformed sinner* disavowing his guilty pleasure/sin and projecting this sin onto *white trash*. Immediate gratification is too easy.

Similarly, Michael Madden, journalist,¹¹⁸ explains that the sex scene in *8 Mile* between Rabbit and his girlfriend, who is described as promiscuous, was the only immediate gratification that the character experiences in his life. Madden's argument comes to Rabbit's defense. He attempts to portray Rabbit as hardworking and unfortunately poor, but even he has to note the immediacy of the sex scene and the *white trashiness* of it.

Because mainstream sex is marital and loving, it takes work and discipline to maintain. The reward of this work and discipline is sex, but *white trash* people allegedly have sex without putting in the work, and this leads *elites* to equate their behavior to rape. The demonization of *white trash* culture occurs so often in media to

¹¹⁷ Murray, C. "The Coming White Underclass." *The Wall Street Journal*. October 29, 2013.

¹¹⁸ Madden, M. "The Other Side of 8 Mile: Discovering the Real Marshall Mathers In 2012, did the Real Slim Shady stand up?" *Consequence of Sound*. July 2014. Retrieved from <http://consequenceofsound.net/2014/07/the-other-side-of-8-mile-discovering-the-real-marshall-mathers/>

attack perceived *white trash* defiance, and rape just happens to be the way that media attacks immediate gratification and non-traditional sex.

Targeting Women

While *white trash* is generally criticized for supposed sexual deviance, *white trash* women are particularly targeted. Just as Madden depicted Rabbit's sex as immediate gratification, he was careful to include that Rabbit's girlfriend was promiscuous, but not Rabbit, despite both parties engaging in intercourse. This is aligned with a large part of the *white trash* sex discourse that slut-shames women. One of the results of mainstream culture highlighting committal sex is social control over a woman's body, as women are often policed more than men for sexual behavior, and this exists strongly in *white trash* discourse. While feminist movements have argued to reduce this stigma against women, discrediting a woman as nothing more than *white trash* allows the policing of her body to be seen as socially acceptable.

For instance, a large part of Hillary Clinton's platform for running for president has been about advocating for "women's rights and opportunities."¹¹⁹ However, a large part of the Clinton, both Hillary and Bill, history has been around allegations of sexual misconduct. For example, Paula Jones accused Bill Clinton of making sexual advances towards her while he was Governor of Arkansas.¹²⁰ In an effort to discredit her, Mr. Clinton's attorney dismissed Ms. Jones as nothing more

¹¹⁹ See Clinton's website: <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/>

¹²⁰ "The Clinton War on Women." *The Wall Street Journal*. December 29, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-clinton-war-on-women-1451432109>

than *tabloid trash*,¹²¹ and it was very clear, as reflected in multiple media accounts of the issue, that tabloid trash was code for *white trash*.

James Carville, a well-known member of the Democratic Party, stated, “Drag a \$100 bill through a trailer park and there's no telling what you'll find.”¹²² Even the most liberal Defenders were dismissing Ms. Jones as nothing more than *white trash*. Not only could *white trash* utilize sex as a commodity, offering it for cash, but they could also use it against *elites* to get money. Furthermore, this dialogue reflects a concern about women reclaiming their sexuality. Women could have sex if they wanted to, and even more relevant, they could turn it down. In nothing more than using status as an excuse, Clinton often claimed that he had never met Ms. Jones,¹²³ because an *elite* man like Clinton would never interact with *white trash*. However, Clinton retracted this statement quickly once evidence to the contrary was presented. Jones's accounts of sexual assault were perceived as a ploy to use sex to her advantage and wrongfully accuse innocent *elite* men, and the media attention highlighted this concern.

Evan Klaidman released an article in a 1997 edition of *Newsweek*, explaining the role of the media in portraying Ms. Jones as *white trash*. He explains that he dismissed her as “just some sleazy woman with big hair coming out of the trailer parks.”¹²⁴ He continued by explaining that this perception of Jones as *white trash* led media outlets to question Jones’s honesty and to attack her sexuality. At the heart of

¹²¹ Fritz, S and John Broder. “\$700,000 Lawsuit Accuses Clinton of Sex Harassment: Complaint: Paula Corbin Jones says then-Arkansas governor made advances toward her in 1991. President’s lawyer calls charges ‘tabloid trash.’” *Los Angeles Times*. May 7, 1994. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/1994-05-07/news/mn-54905_1_paula-corbin-jones

¹²² “The Clinton War on Women.” *The Wall Street Journal*. December 29, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-clinton-war-on-women-1451432109>

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Klaidman, E. “Clinton V. Paula Jones.” *Newsweek*. January 12, 1997.

this discourse is the production of traditional sexual roles. On one side, Paula Jones is just a promiscuous trailer park woman who is using sex to her advantage. On the other hand, critics of Bill Clinton are citing him as *white trash* too, but as a mainstream family deviant as opposed to a sexual deviant. Clinton's critics focus on the fact that this incident "exposes Clinton as a fraud on family values,"¹²⁵ and they do not acknowledge the impact this situation likely had on Jones or the fact that it was non-committal sex. The man is criticized for potentially deviating from "family values," but the woman is criticized for sex. This incident only highlights the social control over sexualities, particularly towards women like Jones, and deeming any sexual deviants as *white trash*.

Clearly, the media demonstrated that Jones's background as *white trash* meant that she did not deserve to be believed. Fast-forward fourteen years and the dialogue has hardly changed. While Hillary Clinton's platform revolved around women's rights, particularly supporting sexual assault survivors, Clinton's platform contains a secret caveat: the support of only mainstream, middle class assault survivors. When asked about the hypocrisy in her campaign, referring to the allegations made against her husband, Hillary Clinton responded "Well, I would say that everybody should be believed at first until they are disbelieved on evidence."¹²⁶ However, the evidence against Jones is nothing more than that she is *white trash*, as reflected in the discourse surrounding the incident. In fact, Hillary Clinton herself issued the following statement in 1998, "I think that when all of this is put into context, and we really look

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Chasmar, J. "Hillary Clinton asked about rape accusations against husband." *Washington Times*. December 3, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/dec/3/hillary-clinton-asked-about-rape-accusations-again/>

at the people involved here, look at their motivations and look at their backgrounds, look at their past behavior, some folks are going to have a lot to answer for.”¹²⁷

Clinton was likely referring to Jones’s background as *white trash*, and suggesting that Jones should not be believed as a result.

The policing of women’s sexuality also occurs in meth discourse. For instance, a study reported by the *National Institute of Health* found crystal methamphetamine use to be significantly associated with drug sales and risky sexual behavior by women.¹²⁸ However, this finding does not seem to have much meaning—assuming that the women in this study are having heterosexual intercourse, the male is also engaging in “risky sexual behavior.” In this case, then it is clear that it is not the meth that is leading to the risky sexual behavior, and it is not the meth that the *elites* are worried about—it is the sex, particularly when young poor white women engage in it unsafely.

All of these examples particularly condemned women for their sexual behaviors. This shows that perceptions of *white trash* are gendered and also a reflection of greater anxieties around deviation from traditional norms, which in this case is sexuality. Furthermore, this concern with *white trash* sex is also a concern of reproducing *white trash* culture, as can be seen in the conversations surrounding Pennsatucky. Pennsatucky was born to a promiscuous *white trash* mother and then became promiscuous and *white trash* herself. *Elites* fear that *white trash* culture is tempting, and *white trash* sex appears to be especially enticing.

¹²⁷ Taylor, K. “Flashback: Hillary Clinton Threatened Bill’s Accusers in 1998.” *Gateway Pundit*. January 5, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2016/01/flashback-hillary-clinton-threatened-bills-accusers-in-1998/>

¹²⁸ Dunham, W. “Study suggests higher U.S. ‘crystal meth’ use.” *Reuters*. June 15, 2007.

Chapter 4

The Family

“They get married one day, unmarried the next, and in the confusion of common law marriages many children never know who their parents are-and nobody cares.”

-Norma Lee Browning, 1957¹²⁹

“Votes seem to have forgiven Clinton [for] his sexual foibles. The Paula Jones case will not provoke impeachment proceedings, and people who say the matter exposes Clinton as a fraud on family values have already made up their minds.”

-Evan Thomas Daniel Klaidman, 1997¹³⁰

“I am just, Jake, I’m for traditional marriage.”

-Donald Trump, 2015¹³¹

In 1957, Norma Lee Browning wrote about the rising concerns surrounding a group that was allegedly taking over Chicago: a poor white group that she called *hillbillies*. Part of the fear of this group, as demonstrated in the quotation above, is that they did not care about marriages or family structure. Forty years later, Clinton, accused of sexually harassing one of his interns, was also accused of defying “family values,” and this offense was judged more harshly than the alleged sexual assault. Over twenty years later, Donald Trump is targeted for deviating from “traditional marriage” in an article written by Elise Foley, an “immigration and politics reporter.” If there is any subject regarding Trump that is lacking in writable material, immigration surely is not one of them. Yet, this writer prioritized targeting Trump’s multiple marriages because traditional marriages are highly regarded in mainstream

¹²⁹ Browning, Norma. “Girl Reporter Visits Jungles of Hillbillies.” *Chicago Tribune*. 1957

¹³⁰ Klaidman, E. “Clinton V. Paula Jones.” *Newsweek*. January 12, 1997.

¹³¹ Foley, E. “Donald Trump Pressed On How ‘Traditional’ His 3 Marriage Are.” *Huffington Post*. June 28, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/28/donald-trump-gay-marriage_n_7681570.html

culture. The work needed to preserve these traditional values over time is demonstrated by this discourse existing for well over seven decades in targeting people that fail to abide by the rules of the traditional family, such as marriage, commitment, and fidelity.

In his novel, *Coming Apart*, Charles Murray argues that “the question for founders and for commentators in the nineteenth century was not whether marriage itself was essential to the functioning of society— of course it was— but about behavior within marriage.”¹³² It is Murray’s “of course it was” remark that summarizes the mainstream discourse around traditional marriage and familial values. “Of course” they are important and to target one’s deviation from this tradition is so powerful, because to not endorse these values elicits immediate prejudice. Of course one could deviate from these values, but those who can do the work to maintain these values are the ones deserving of recognition. And those that do not maintain these values are a threat and need to be targeted. As a result, both Donald Trump and Bill Clinton have been called *white trash*, despite being wealthy whites in *elite* social positions. Defiance of traditional family values is an oft-cited marker for *white trash* and is just another way that the discourse around *white trash* works to protect and maintain the current societal structure.

¹³² Murray 2012

Marriage

At the heart of the traditional family is what Murray deems “the bedrock of society”— marriage.¹³³ Furthermore, Murray argues that morality is directly connected to marriage. By making this connection, Murray is creating the moral and the immoral, the family and the non-family, which is the same distinction that is used in mainstream media characterizing individuals as *traditional/elite/white* or *white trash*. However, it is not just marriage that is important and moral, but rather the values at the core of marriage: consistency and fidelity.

Permanence of Marriage: Consistency

One of the factors that allows marriage to be an *elite* value is the “permanence of marriage.”¹³⁴ The importance of marriage and the traditional family lies in this maintenance of a constant structure, as this constant structure allows an institution to maintain some level of social control. Furthermore, maintaining a marriage requires the *elites* “discipline and regulation,” as showing in the numerous books and articles arguing about ways to save or fix a marriage. *White trash*, on the other hand, are perceived to be both inconsistent and unwilling to work hard. In fact, when *white trash* do get married, they do not marry *right*. Allegedly, *white trash* do not usually get married, but when they do, they do not stay married, as Browning argues “married one day, unmarried the next.”¹³⁵ *White trash* is criticized for rejecting consistency within a structure that is meant to enforce stability and consistency.

¹³³ Ibid., 135

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Browning, Norma. “Girl Reporter Visits Jungles of Hillbillies.” *Chicago Tribune*. 1957

Fidelity

Another aspect of mainstream marriage that is consistent with *elite* values is fidelity, and the sexual commitment to one individual for life.¹³⁶ Sex within marriage can be divided into two distinct categories: sex to fulfill commitment to one's partner and sex to produce offspring. These limitations of sexuality in traditional marriage views are important as they increasingly allow the *elites* to maintain the *Other*, groups that deviate from monogamous heterosexual sex. While the heteronormative construction of marriage has often been used to patrol queer sex, the anxieties surrounding *white trash* and marriage are different. The concern with *white trash sex* as it relates to the traditional family is not necessarily deviation from heterosexuality, but the concern is instead the lack of monogamous sex and the potential product of sex: children.

Commitment to One Partner

Murray's general concern is that the values of the *elite* may soon cease to be the dominant perspective as the values associated with *white trash* become more prominent. One of these values is marriage, and Murray begins his marriage argument by discussing the change in perceptions of committed sex outside of a marriage (i.e. having sex with one person outside of marriage or having sex with someone you know you will marry prior to the marriage). Decades ago, a majority of people endorsed the traditional notion that individuals/couples should wait until marriage for sex. However, as Murray explains, fewer people endorse that today and are more

¹³⁶ Murray 2012: 135

willing to have pre-marital sex with someone they know they will marry.¹³⁷ It is not hard to understand why this would be a concern for people like Murray who place high emphasis on traditional roles. Sex within marriage entails all of the social control that comes with traditional marriage. Furthermore, divorce is stigmatized and costly, so marriage brings a substantial amount of social control. Of course, one could be married and have sex with multiple partners, but adultery is heavily stigmatized. Thus, the opposition to Murray and other Moralists is clear: why get married if one can have committed sex without all of the control of a marriage? In an effort to fight back against this potential rebelliousness, the *elite* desire to create a stigma against this behavior, and *white trash* serves as the stigmatized label. Cheat within marriage, you're an adulterer, have sex outside of marriage, and you are plain *white trash*.

The desire to have sex with more than one person for the rest of one's life is hardly an anomaly. In fact, Murray highlights a "sexual revolution" that occurred in the 1970s that lowered society's view on the immorality of extramarital sex.¹³⁸ However, shortly after these revolutions, extramarital sex was quickly seen as immoral again. Interestingly enough, residents of Fishtown agreed that extramarital sex was wrong. Not only did they have extramarital sex, they also reported what *elite* culture wanted them to report. They were still having the extramarital sex that occurred during the sexual revolution, but they supposedly did not care that it was deemed wrong. Nothing is more threatening to the *elite* than a potential deviant who agrees to the existence of cultural norms, yet purposefully defies them.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Since there is less social control over sex outside of marriage, Moralists need more marriages to maintain the values they endorse. Thus, in an effort to counter this potential dismissal of traditional marriage, Murray calls for the “end of all economic support for single mothers.”¹³⁹ He explains that this has three benefits: mothers will have to get money from more mature adults, there will be more adoption, and this will increase the stigma around single mothers. Thus, Murray argues for stigmatization of anything that deviates from the mainstream in an effort to maintain some level of social control.

Offspring

This stigmatization leads to the construction of the *good mother* and the *good father*, which leads to the second component of sex within marriage: kids. These children are imperative to transmitting cultural values throughout generations. Not only is it important to be married, it is also important to wait for sex until marriage to prevent illegitimate birth and the reproduction of *white trash* values. Fidelity is critical within traditional marriage as it leads to the birth of a child within a socially acceptable family structure, where there is both a father and a mother in the home.

On the other hand, extramarital sex that leads to children generates a subcategory of family, a category that defies traditional marriage expectations. As this becomes more commonplace, the number of nontraditional families increases. Furthermore, the product of a nontraditional family also threatens the socialization and normalization of the nontraditional. In fact, Moralists are specifically concerned with the behavior of *white trash* kids and the risk of influence on *elite* kids. However,

¹³⁹ Murray, C. “The Coming White Underclass.” *The Wall Street Journal*. October 29, 2013.

with more extramarital sex and more *white trash* children, it becomes more difficult to keep the number of *white trash* kids in school below the coveted 25% mark. Once more *white trash* children enroll in schools with their *elite* peers, their culture threatens to sway the culture of the *elite* children, and ultimately the culture of the educational institution itself.

The Good Mother

Murray argues that women who are married with a family are happier than an unmarried woman with a career.¹⁴⁰ This places a division between motherhood and a career, and it assumes that a woman has to choose one or the other. Murray's construction of a good mother is one that takes care of the home and caters to the husband, who is employed, as opposed to working. This construction of the good mother is common in media, as mothers typically lose their status as individuals after giving birth and instead assume to role of "mother," which entails a socially constructed idea of *what* makes a *good* mother, and unsurprisingly, the *white trash mother* is not the *good mother*.

For instance, Tim Goodman, of *The Hollywood Reporter*, targets the sister of Honey Boo Boo, Anna 'Chickadee,' for stating that "she'll probably be a good, but not great, mother."¹⁴¹ Yet, Goodman does not go into much detail about what a *great* mother entails or even why one would want to be a *great mother*, because it elicits this "of course" mentality: "Of course" one should be a *great* mother. However, the

¹⁴⁰ Murray 2012: 149

¹⁴¹ Goodman, T. "Honey Boo Boo": That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore." *The Hollywood Reporter*. August 22, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bastard-machine/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-alana-mama-364933>

concept of a *great mother* can be understood by visiting some of the conversations regarding Chickadee's mother, Mama June.

Defenders of Mama June still participate in this dialogue of whether or not she is a *good mother*. For instance, Ada Calhoun, in her article "Perspective: Leave Honey Boo Boo's Mom Alone," comes to Mama June's defense because Mama June "manages her household carefully."¹⁴² Calhoun continues by saying that "more important, the stay-at-home matriarch seems to genuinely enjoy her chalk-miner husband, nicknamed "Sugar Bear," and to love all her daughters for who they are."¹⁴³ Thus, Mama June can be a *good mother* as long as her house is clean and her husband is loved.

Another point of contention between Moralists and Defenders is Mama June's status as "the coupon queen." Ada Calhoun supports Mama as the matriarch because Mama uses her coupons to get "enough paper towels to last through the Rapture" to "manage her household."¹⁴⁴ However, Goodman clearly has some serious anxieties concerning Mama as a "coupon queen" because he consistently drops it into sentences as some sort of complaint. He states that Mama is "into 'extreme couponing and justifying a way to save money so she can send Alana to another pageant'" and that the extreme couponing makes "Mama a hoarder."¹⁴⁵ Goodman fails to explicitly state his concerns around couponing, but couponing, along with welfare, defies

¹⁴² Calhoun, A. "Perspective: Leave Honey Boo Boo's Mom Alone." *Los Angeles Times*. August 18, 2012. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/18/entertainment/la-et-st-honey-boo-boo-tlc-20120819>

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Goodman, T. "'Honey Boo Boo': That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore." *The Hollywood Reporter*. August 22, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bastard-machine/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-alana-mama-364933>

traditional values in that it gives the woman the power to make her own decisions,¹⁴⁶ decisions that belong to the traditional *good father*.

In *Color of Class*, Kirby Moss conducts an ethnography on poor whites. One of his participants, Sharon, explains that people perceive her negatively once they learn that she is unemployed and does not have a man supporting her, because that means she is on welfare.¹⁴⁷ Thus, welfare allows her to be both unemployed and more importantly, not have a man support her. Because if she were to work, then how could she take care of the home as a *good mother* would do, as presidential candidate Ben Carson said about his own mother, “she could not have provided for us and kept up the house without that subsidy.”¹⁴⁸ And if the *white trash* mother does not work, then who is providing the money if it is not a man?

Teen Mom as White Trash Mom

In March of 2015, Farrah Abraham called her *Teen Mom* co-star, Catelynn Lowell, *white trash*.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*, Gail Dines and Jean McMahon Humez recap the depiction of Jamie Lynn Spears as *white trash*.¹⁵⁰ The depiction of teen mothers as *white trash* is not only an effort to attack teen pregnancy, but is also used to attack young women who stray from the traditional

¹⁴⁶ food stamps are typically seen as *white trash*, as can be seen in Moby’s depiction of his past self as *white trash*: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/28/garden/28moby.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

¹⁴⁷ Moss 2003: 58

¹⁴⁸ Delaney, A. and Sam Stein. “13 Famous People Who Once Got Food Stamps.” *The Huffington Post*. February 20, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/02/20/food-stamps-celebrities_n_4824405.html

¹⁴⁹ Erikson, J. “Farrah Abraham’s Latest Insult to Catelynn Lowell Is Just Plain Mean!” *The Stir*. March 31, 2015. Retrieved from http://thestir.cafemom.com/tv/184344/farrah_abrahams_latest_insult_to

¹⁵⁰ Dines, Gail and Jean McMahon Humez. 1995. *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: a Text-Reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

perception of (particularly young) female sexuality. Dines and Humez, argue that this classification of *white trash* reflects apprehension regarding “transgressive femininity that uses sex to get ahead, situated in opposition to middle class femininity that hides and protects its young girls’ sexuality.”¹⁵¹ Thus, the biggest concern is that *white trash* females are not only having sex, but also using this sex to “get ahead,” which appears in many ways, like food stamps and children’s pageant competitions.

The same anxieties concerning Lynn Spears using Jamie Lynn Spears to get media attention are reflected in discussions about Mama June. Tim Goodman, of *The Hollywood Reporter*, defines Honey Boo Boo as “pageant-whored-out by her obese mother, June.”¹⁵² Similarly, Charles Hurt of *The Washington Times* explains that Honey Boo Boo “is a little girl endlessly exploited by her family in beauty pageants, and she never shuts up.”¹⁵³ Critics of the show are not only concerned about Mama June having children at an early age, who then also have children at an early age, but they are also concerned that these children can make money for the matriarch. Furthermore, Goodman explains that Honey Boo Boo will say *anything*, such as “a dollar make me wanna holler,” and “she is all about money. And pageants.”¹⁵⁴ Honey Boo Boo and the female members of her family are reflective of *elite* anxieties: they make money and they are willing to defy how a woman should present herself.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 131

¹⁵² Goodman, T. “‘Honey Boo Boo’: That Joke Isn’t Funny Anymore.” *The Hollywood Reporter*. August 22, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bastard-machine/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-alana-mama-364933>

¹⁵³ Hurt, C. “HURT: The boo-boo of ‘Here Comes Honey Boo Boo’” *The Washington Times*. August 27, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/27/the-boo-boo-of-here-comes-honey-boo-boo/?page=all>

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Good Father

A *good father* is necessary to maintain a social hierarchy within the home and to ensure the social control over the heavily gendered roles both inside and outside of the home. It is the role of the *good father* to teach to the children what the *woman* should be distanced from: sex, money, and power. With the absence of the traditional father, the mother becomes the dominant instructor of social norms, which is a deviation from traditional gendered parental roles, and *elites* are concerned that the mother's ability to teach the lessons learned by the father is inadequate.

In *The Coming Underclass*, Murray explains that fatherless boys will be unsocialized and learn physical violence, immediate gratification, and predatory sex.¹⁵⁵ Because a *good mother* avoids sexuality as a discussion, or is otherwise unqualified to teach proper male sexuality, young boys will never learn how to have *proper sex* and thus must be rapists. Furthermore, Murray argues that the *white trash* population has the highest number of unemployed men, as a *good father* is needed to teach young boys about their roles: to work and provide for the family.

For example, the general public is curious about the children of Steven Avery. Gigi Masilotti of *HNGN* states, "People can't help but wonder what happened to Steven Avery's children."¹⁵⁶ Lesley Messer of *ABC News* says that the number one thing to know about Steven Avery is that he has children.¹⁵⁷ The children have explicitly asked to be kept private and want no part in the high-profile life of Steven

¹⁵⁵ Murray, C. "The Coming White Underclass." *The Wall Street Journal*. October 29, 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Masilotti, G. "'Making A Murderer': Where Are Steven Avery's Wife And Kids Now?" January 10, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.hngn.com/articles/168170/20160110/making-murderer-where-steven-averys-wife-kids-now.htm>

¹⁵⁷ Messer, L. "5 Things to Know About Steven Avery From 'Making A Murderer.'" *ABC News*. January 5, 2016. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/things-steven-avery-making-murderer/story?id=36090236>

Avery, yet people are still obsessed with learning more about them. However, none of this media discourse concerning Steven Avery's children reveals *why* people are fascinated with knowing about the children, because it is assumed that they should be concerned. Without the father figure in their lives, these children are at risk of what Murray explains: learning violent behavior, becoming rapists, and not being socialized. Implicitly, this media is reproducing the traditional portrayal of the *good father*.

This gendered perspective of what parenting should be like is core to traditional marriages. Murray highlights fear around the decline in traditional gender roles. He cites a survey showing that as perceptions of traditional gender roles in the family fell ("women should tend the family"),¹⁵⁸ divorce rates also increased. Thus, perceptions of these gender norms are linked to the construction of the traditional marriage, and the relationship between decreasing perceptions of traditional gender norms and increasing number of divorces suggests that people are getting divorces as they challenge traditional roles of mothers and women, providing further support that marriage is a representation of set cultural expectations and behaviors.

Anti-Socialization

Moralists argue that traditional marriage is crucial for the upbringing of a healthy child.¹⁵⁹ Murray categorizes the impact of non-marriage on children into many categories, but the reality is that these categories can easily be summed up into one statement: *white trash* parents give birth to *white trash* kids who then publicly

¹⁵⁸ Murray, 2012: 151

¹⁵⁹ Fomby, P. and A. J. Cherlin. 2007. "Family Instability And Child Well-Being." *American Sociological Review* 72(2):181–204.

demonstrate *white trash* culture,¹⁶⁰ which is coded in research as “externalizing behavior.” These kids, along with their entire *white trash* family then become “antisocial” and fail to assimilate into *mainstream* culture.

The externalizing behavior is associated with peer problems, hyperactivity, conduct disorders, includes behaviors such as being argumentative, being disobedient at school or at home, and having trouble relating to others¹⁶¹

In *Family Instability and Child Well-Being*, Fomby and Chernin argue that lack of marriage leads to instability, and this instability leads to “externalizing behavior.” “Externalizing behavior” represents the threat that *white trash* culture has on the broader community. For instance, they’ll have “peer problems and trouble relating to others,” which is another way of saying that these kids fail to conform, which is deemed “antisocial.” However, as mentioned before, the children’s alleged behavioral issues are only a proxy for general *white trash* behavior. Failing to relate to the general population is often reflected in the greater discourse of *white trash*. Furthermore, the concern is not only that *white trash* people have trouble relating to others, but also that they do not care to.

In *Making a Murderer*, the entire Avery family is characterized as *white trash* by describing their lack of involvement in community events. In the first eight minutes of the series, Steven Avery’s appointed lawyer, Reesa Evans, describes the entire family: “They weren’t involved in the community activities. It did not cross their mind that they should fit into the community. They fit into the community that they had built and that was enough.”¹⁶² The fact that the entire family’s lack of involvement in the community played such a critical role in a series documenting a

¹⁶⁰ Murray 2012

¹⁶¹ Fomby and Chernin 2007: 187

¹⁶² In *Making A Murderer*, episode 1

man accused of rape and murder demonstrates the intensity of the claims: not participating in community affairs makes you appear more like a murderer and a rapist.

People feared the Averys. They lived on the outskirts of town, and they did not really try to fit into the norm, which is a sincere cause of concern for *elites*. In fact, it is such a concern that there have been many movies documenting *white trash* as a violent, mysterious group that distance themselves both socially and physically from their more *elite*, middle class peers. For example, *Deliverance* depicts *white trash* living on the outskirts of town. The *white trash* are only approached by mainstream, middle class individuals when the *mainstream* attempt to go on a peaceful canoe ride. The violent *white trash* are immediately shown to be odd and antisocial as Lonnie is unwilling to shake the hands of the middle class men, and the movie ultimately depicts the *white trash* violently attacking and raping the *mainstream*. This presents a message that the mysterious, antisocial outsiders must be savage, despicable rapists.

Deeper analysis of the antisocial culture of *white trash* shows that the concern is not really that the group is entirely antisocial, just that they are antisocial when around groups outside of their own, as stated by Avery's appointed lawyer. This same dialogue occurs in methamphetamine discourse. For example, in a 2007 *Reuters* article written by Will Dunham, Dunham explains that methamphetamine use by women is "associated with risky sexual behavior such as unprotected sex."¹⁶³ Yet, just a few lines later, Dunham quotes NIDA Director Dr. Nora Volkow as saying that "the study suggests the drug is associated with risky and antisocial behaviors."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Dunham, W. "Study suggests higher U.S. 'crystal meth' use." *Reuters*. June 15, 2007.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Arguably, unprotected sex is not antisocial, demonstrating that Dunham is not really trying to describe the influence of meth use on antisocial behavior, but he is instead showing meth use as a lack of participation in *elite* culture. *White trash* people are not volunteering in the community. Instead, they are staying at home, consuming meth, and having lots of unprotected sex, and that is what *elites* are anxious about: Not meth, not antisocial behavior.

Similarly, in a 2004 article written in *The Seattle Times*, Michael Ko discusses the appearance of a meth lab bust in a *non-white trash* environment. At the end of the article, Ko cites a neighbor, who is a retired flight attendant as saying, "nothing surprises me anymore, but you don't want it in your neighborhood. You feel like you've been robbed of that security of knowing your neighbors."¹⁶⁵ The neighbor's quote shows concern around social behaviors and his knowledge of those around him, not meth use.

It is expected that people engage with their community, especially neighbors, because this is an excellent way of learning and reinforcing cultural knowledge that aids in social mobility. An easy way for cultural habits to pass from one generation to next is through the family, but when one's family is *white trash*, *elite* culture is not passed down, and this is threatening. Rather than passing along *elite* culture, *white trash* threaten to pass along *white trash* culture, threatening a rise in the *white trash* population.

¹⁶⁵ Ko, M. "Meth lab found in Hawthorne Hills." *Seattle Times*. April 14, 2004

Child-Rearing

It is the role of the parent to pass along *elite* culture to their offspring, as explained by Lareau in her books, *Home Advantage* and *Unequal Childhoods*. Lareau explains that children from higher social classes typically perform better in the education system. For example, in *Home Advantage*, Lareau states, "it is clear that taking art lessons and going to museums influences grades and college aspirations; it is less clear why it provides this advantage."¹⁶⁶ This suggests that the education system, along with other social institutions, is tied to *mainstream* culture, and individuals are rewarded within these institutions for fully assimilating into the mainstream.

Lareau explains that the difference in school performance may result from a difference in two forms of cultural child rearing: "concerted cultivation" and "accomplishment of natural growth."¹⁶⁷ She explains that "concerted cultivation" is a middle class technique that uses "organized activities, established and controlled by mothers and fathers" to teach children a "sense of entitlement" that then allows them to challenge their teachers and perform well in school. *White trash* families use the "accomplishment of natural growth" method that instead allows children to have a great amount of leisure time with limited structure, while also teaching them not to question authority.

In what initially appears to be an assessment of different cultural traits, Lareau quickly places value on one of the methods, by saying "these adults [*white trash*] do not consider the concerted development of children, particularly through organized

¹⁶⁶ Lareau, Annette. 2000. *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education*: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

¹⁶⁷ Lareau 2003

leisure activities, an essential aspect of good parenting.”¹⁶⁸ Through this, Lareau is deeming low-income parents as not "good parents." It is clear that Lareau's perception of parenting is directly linked to the child's educational attainment and participation in *mainstream* culture; *white trash* parents are not good parents and they need to be taught how to be good parents by the school.

Thus, the education system's goal is not just to teach children middle class culture, but it is also a way to educate the entire family in middle class values, which is why Lareau and her peers are fascinated by parental involvement in schooling. James Coleman, frequently cited in Lareau's work, is known for his research on social capital and human capital, particularly as it relates to the family. Coleman defines human capital as "approximately measured by parents' education and provides the potential for a cognitive environment for the child that aids learning.”¹⁶⁹ Coleman connects one's worth as a *human* to their education and potential to aid a child's learning. According to this line of reasoning, *white trash* people do not fit Coleman's elitist view of what it means to be human.

Lareau then targets the poor parents' antisocial behavior. When discussing the children's feelings towards her project, she states that the low-income children's "delight in the study was clearly stronger in the working-class and poor families, possibly because it was rare for these children to meet adults outside of their extended family, neighbors, and teachers.”¹⁷⁰ The *white trash* kids are not only performing worse in school, they are also not getting enough exposure to middle class people,

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3

¹⁶⁹ Coleman, James S. 1988. "Social Capital In the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94.

¹⁷⁰ Lareau 2003: 9

and a brief interruption in their day-to-day by the wonderfully *elite* Lareau and her researchers is enough to brighten up their lives. Lareau is explicitly relating happiness levels to exposure to *elite* culture. She insinuates that children want exposure to *elite* culture and *white trash* parents deprive their children of this exposure.

Chapter 5

Education

“We won with poorly educated. I love the poorly educated.”
-Donald Trump¹⁷¹

“I never expected #idiocracy to become a documentary.”
-Etan Cohen¹⁷²

On February 23, 2016, after winning the Nevada Republican caucus, Donald Trump celebrated by declaring that he won the votes of both the “highly educated” and the “poorly educated.” Trump's love for the poorly educated received many negative responses. Etan Cohen, co-writer of *Idiocracy*, tweeted in reference to Donald Trump's statement, and Twitter exploded with liberals mocking and targeting Trump for his love of the poorly educated. Adam Johnson, an author for Alternet, responded by stating that Cohen's comment depicted Trump's supporters as “toothless *redneck* and science-denying idiots.”¹⁷³ This approach of the public to associate Trump with *redneck* and *white trash* can be seen as an act of maintaining the purity of whiteness. As explained earlier and throughout the rest of this essay, the labels *redneck* and *white trash* are almost exclusively linked to socioeconomic status, and the only time that these labels are applied to non-poor whites, such as Trump being labeled *white trash*, is to distance whiteness from less than pure actions.

The media attention around the similarities between Trump and the film *Idiocracy* demonstrates that the culture in the film, a culture in which education is not

¹⁷¹ Trump stated this after he won the Nevada caucus. A video of his statement can be found at <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/trump-i-love-the-poorly-educated/>

¹⁷² This was posted by Etan Cohen on his twitter account (@etanjc) on February 24, 2016.

¹⁷³ Johnson, A. “‘Idiocracy’ Is One of the Most Elitist and Anti-Social Movies Ever— Why Do Liberals Love Referencing It?” *Alternet*. March 4, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.alternet.org/media/idiocracy-has-one-cruellest-and-anti-social-plotlines-youll-find-hollywood-movie-why-do>

deemed valuable, is not satirical, but rather a legitimate fear of the *elite*. *Idiocracy* documents an *elite white* male that accidentally travels 500 years in the future and is then initially discriminated against and mocked for his superior knowledge. The society survived for the 500 years and people were happy and thriving, despite intelligence not being prioritized, depicting a scenario that the *elites* fear. In fact, the main character, who had traveled into the future, decided to stay in the future, reflecting a *reformed sinner* who relapsed.

Education is something that has to be earned and worked hard for, and *elites* maintain their power by reinforcing the importance of education. However, a world that does not prioritize education is a world in which *elite whites* are not able to justify their status based on their superior intellect. *Idiocracy* shows that skipping school could be easy and fun. However, this is the sin/guilty pleasure that the *reformed sinner* despises, which leads to an *elite* desire to portray lack of education as something evil, something concerning, and something less. Thus, the portrayal of Trump as a *redneck* with a following of uneducated voters is only a method of distancing Trump from whiteness by inadvertently equating lack of intelligence with racism (because Trump is racist), and further generating prejudice towards low-status groups and reinforcing *elite* values.

The role of educational attainment as a social marker is used to distinguish between high and low-status whites. As a result, education is a method of socialization across generations and a process through which a social hierarchy is maintained. The use of education as a boundary marker is prominent in *white trash*

discourse, but these discussions assume the role of education as necessary and do not question its role in maintaining *elite* values.

Dialect

Of course, literal educational attainment is not physically manifested, but one can perform education through dialect and language, which is immediately apparent in conversation and serves as a way of distinguishing between *elites* and *non-elites*. Charles Murray, in “Prole Models,” argues that language is a sign “used to recognize a member of the underclass.”¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, research suggests that both educational status and dialect are related to one’s standing on the “social ladder,” with the Southern Appalachian dialect correlating with the lowest prestige level in the US.¹⁷⁵ Kirk Hazen and Sarah Hamilton, in *A Dialect Turned Inside Out*, analyze the changes in dialect in a group of Appalachians measured by migration and education, and they find that there is a significant relationship between educational attainment and using “non-vernacular variants.”¹⁷⁶

Because dialects can serve as a representation of educational attainment, there is a “cost” in the education system. In order to succeed and continue on, one must leave their dialect, deemed unintelligent and uneducated, behind. In fact, it calls into question the role and meaning behind obtaining education; is education’s role to raise *intelligence* or to reinforce *elite* values? Education can be both achieved and performed (e.g. dialect), and *white trash* discourse demonstrates that there is a social

¹⁷⁴ Murray, C. “Prole Models.” *The Wall Street Journal*. February 6, 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.aei.org/publication/prole-models/print/>

¹⁷⁵ Neace, Donald. 2012. “Accent Effects on Recall: Southern Appalachian Accent versus Television National News Anchor Accent.” Master thesis, Southern Connecticut State University.

¹⁷⁶ Hazen, K. and Hamilton, S. 2008. “A Dialect Turned Inside Out: Migration And the Appalachian Diaspora.” *Journal of English Linguistics* 36(2):105–28.

punishment for lack of participating in the educational assimilation process. Thus, education is not only a means of raising one's intelligence, but also a means of perpetuating social values and norms through performance, as it relates to vocabulary and dialect.

On August 03, 2014, Marc Hill, author for *The Huffington Post*, posted a video in response to Cliven Bundy's effort to reclaim his land from the federal government.¹⁷⁷ In this video, *the Huffington Post* reporters mocked Cliven Bundy by quoting Bundy in an unnatural, poor imitation of a Southern dialect in order to mock Bundy's intelligence and validity. The reporters were participating in a culture of equating Southern dialect with lack of intelligence or education, and using this relationship as a way of distancing southern dialect from whiteness.

Relating specific dialects to terrorism has become increasingly common in the past few months in relation to the perceived "Oregon Militia," in which critics of the movement have relied on terms such as "VanillaIsis," "YallQaeda," and "Al-Shabubba" to equate the southern dialect and culture to terrorism. Interestingly, before this incident *The Huffington Post* was deemed "too politically correct" after Jenna Amatulli, an author for *The Huffington Post*, came to the defense of a *Jeopardy* contestant who was being mocked for her voice.¹⁷⁸ Amatulli argued that this attack on the accent was misogynistic, but there was no backlash against *The Huffington Post's* own mocking of regional (in this case, Southern) dialects. The fact that a website that publicly marks itself a "politically liberal American online news" source is willing to

¹⁷⁷ Hill, M. "Cliven Bundy: God Told Me To Fight 'Civil War' Against Feds." *The Huffington Post*. August 3, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/03/cliven-bundy-iap-god-civil-war- n_5646121.html

¹⁷⁸ Chandler, R. 2015. "HuffPo Columnist Leaps To Defense Of Jeopardy Laura." *SportsGrid*. November 25, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.sportsgrid.com/video/columnist-leaps-to-defense-of-jeopardy-laura-says-voice-critics-are-misogynistic/>

make these statements reflects a cultural emphasis on the role of dialect as a social marker, relating to both educational attainment and intelligence level.

Furthermore, this dialogue positions education as an *elite* value that serves as a boundary intra-racially, and is used as a method for *elite whites* to further distance themselves from the responsibility of societal issues. “YallQaeda” specifies Southern dialect and lower-status, again allowing *elite whites* to maintain the purity of their status. It is important to note that the arrival of the term “YallQaeda” comes after substantial discourse arguing that white people are not referenced as *terrorists*, whereas people of color are. However, rather than this dialogue addressing a *white* attack or threat of terrorism, it portrays the incidents as a *redneck/white trash* attack. “YallQaeda” is still not addressing *white* people, because *white trash* and *rednecks* are perceived as *not quite white*. This suggests that *white* people are not terrorists, but rather uneducated people, and education can rid one of immoral thoughts and non-traditional values, as the current education system promotes a specific culture, set of behaviors, and values. By positioning education, and thus *elite* values, away from terrorism and violent acts, education is further justified as a great equalizer. As a result, the education system serves as an excellent form of social control for the *elites* over the socialization of the next generation.

Education as Social Mobility

The role of education as a reinforcement of cultural values can be seen in the current dialogue surrounding who should be allowed in elite schools. Research has highlighted both race and socioeconomic status as predictors of educational

attainment. What these conversations have failed to acknowledge, however, is that the current education system, particularly higher education, is discriminatory. When navigating the logistics of admissions, there is a need to distinguish particular candidates from their peers in some way. This debate revolves around what standards are more acceptable. This indirectly promotes education as an *elite* value only accessible to some, and this supports the social hierarchy that is created. The education system is then perceived to be a route through which social mobility is possible. However, social mobility is only possible if there is a social hierarchy to be mobile within.

Recently, advocates for a more diverse education system have battled over whether recruitment efforts should be prioritized based on socioeconomic status (SES integration) or race. However, advocates of SES integration condemn, yet pity *white trash* behavior that seemingly dismisses education as valuable, and are invested in reducing *white trash* culture. This is apparent both in discourse of the merits of SES integration as well as discussions of schools that have attempted to integrate various SES backgrounds.

SES Integration Advocates

Richard D. Kahlenberg—The New Integration

Richard Kahlenberg is a senior fellow at *The Century Foundation* and is known as “the intellectual father of the [socio]economic integration movement.”¹⁷⁹ In “The New Integration,” Kahlenberg argues, “next to a student’s family, the

¹⁷⁹ See the “Experts and Staff” section of *The Century Foundation’s* website: <http://www.tcf.org/experts/detail/richard-d.-kahlenberg>

socioeconomic status of his or her school is the single most important determinant of academic success.”¹⁸⁰ However, it is not immediately clear what Kahlenberg means by “socioeconomic status” of the school. From a first glance, Kahlenberg’s focus appears to be on the financial wellbeing of the school, which would highlight the resources and financial contributions available to a school or school system. However, his push for “socioeconomic integration” is not improving the socioeconomic status of a school, such as fund raising or allocating more government funding to school systems. Instead, Kahlenberg’s definition of “school socioeconomic status” is directly correlated to the socioeconomic status of the *students* that attend. Kahlenberg suggests limiting the percentage of low-income students enrolled in each school to ensure that no school has more than half of its population on “free or reduced lunch.”

Kahlenberg is not arguing to move poor kids to wealthy areas or wealthy kids to poor areas, as there is no limit to how many middle class or wealthy students can be in a given school or school district. Instead, he is suggesting the removal of poor kids from “poor” schools and directly setting a limit on the amount of poor culture allowed within one space. This aligns with the argument of Murray that poor culture is contagious and can negatively impact the mainstream norms. Again, *elite* culture is something that must be earned and worked for, and poor culture is tempting and threatening; if there is too much temptation, the wealthier students might just move away from traditional values that allow the *elite* to remain *elite*.

¹⁸⁰ Kahlenberg, R. 2006. “The New Integration.” *Educational Leadership*, 23.

Kahlenberg highlights that “the socioeconomic makeup of a school rather than its racial makeup, drives student achievement.”¹⁸¹ Here, Kahlenberg negates the previous research that focuses on minority students and instead shifts his focus to “socioeconomic status.” The only change in this approach is the inclusion of a different demographic: *poor white* students. Kahlenberg is arguing that its not just poor culture, but *poor white* culture that is particularly threatening.

However, one could expect that Kahlenberg’s work would not be well received if he just blamed it on the students. Instead, Kahlenberg explains that the underperformance of low-income students is partially because the students are “less likely to come from family environments that support academic achievement.”¹⁸² Kahlenberg has highlighted the aspects of the *poor white* culture that concerns education elitists: entire families that care less about academic achievement. This lack of “support for academic achievement” is just another way of targeting general anxieties concerning *white trash*: their unwillingness to prioritize work over leisure and straying from the constantly occupied/structured schedule that exists in the middle class culture.

Furthermore, Kahlenberg cites high teacher turnover as another factor influencing student’s low achievement. This teacher turnover is either a result of the teachers leaving or the teachers being fired. If the teachers are leaving, then even teachers cannot handle this poor white culture, and Kahlenberg does not approach the issue as to why teachers do not want to stay teaching *poor white* kids, assuming that the answer is obvious: why would they? Instead, Kahlenberg is suggesting

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

incorporating wealthier kids in the classroom to ensure a more pleasing experience for the teachers themselves, and hoping that the majority being *elite whites* will encourage teachers to stay around.

On the other hand, the teachers could be getting fired as Kahlenberg takes an additional jab at this culture by discussing these negligent and unfaithful teachers as less qualified based on their test scores, experience, training and education. Interestingly, the same adjectives used to describe these failing teachers are the terms used to describe *white trash*. Kahlenberg is arguing that *white trash* teachers are teaching *white trash* students, which could never succeed in the current structure given that *white trash* culture supposedly does not place the same emphasis on the importance of education as an *elite* culture.

He explains that these *poor white* teachers hold “lower expectations” for their *poor white* students. Kahlenberg is suggesting that all students should be held to the same expectations, and he is not suggesting *white trash* expectations, but rather *elite* expectations. Thus, anything less than *elite* expectations will fail, so this leads to only two choices: either choose education and the *elite* culture that comes with it or fail out and leave the education system. *Elites* are concerned that *white trash* people have already made their choice: rejection of the education system.

After avoiding placing blame on students for the entire essay, Kahlenberg finally gets to his point: low-income students are more likely to be around “peers who are more likely to misbehave and disparage academic achievement.”¹⁸³ This is the ultimate anxiety: that students are misbehaving and just do not care; they are not even trying. *Elites* fear that *white trash* kids are far removed from *elite* culture that

¹⁸³ Ibid.

prioritizes education, and this threatens the rise in a culture that rejects the importance of education, as demonstrated in *Idiocracy*.

Finally, Kahlenberg concludes his article by easing one of the biggest concerns around *white trash*: the contagiousness of their culture. Kahlenberg argues that “economic mixing does not harm middle class students”¹⁸⁴ and this perfectly captures the goal of socioeconomic integration: change the *poor* kids to be *elite*, but do not change the *elite* kids. The *poor* kids need to be socialized while the *elite* kids maintain the *elite* values that they have learned over time, and in order for this to happen, the *poor* kids need to be limited in number.

The *elite* anxiety around student’s potential defiance and neglect in the education system demonstrates how crucial the current education system is in creating and maintaining an *elite*. Any disruption in this system is a threat to *elite* social standing as it remains today. In fact, failure to participate in the education system is such a threat to *elite* status, that liberal education reformers (Defenders) desperately try and articulate why students would not perform well in the education system, while encouraging students that its “not their fault,” and that with hard work, anyone can do it.

Calarco—Coached for the Classroom

The sample population used in Calarco’s “Coached for the Classroom” is an excellent depiction of the demographic that Kahlenberg hopes to achieve in all schools: a primarily middle class student body with limited working class students. However, Calarco finds that even when low-status whites enroll at non-poor schools,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 26

there is still a lack of assimilation. As a result, she explores the experiences of white students that attend Maplewood,¹⁸⁵ and compares the experiences across socioeconomic status: working-class versus middle class.¹⁸⁶

Calarco immediately assumes the role of the Defender, as demonstrated in her methodology section. She differentiates between students within working-class whites: she defines a subset of working class as “settled-living,”¹⁸⁷ which is dependent on the existence of an “other,” the not-settled living. She explains that her working class sample is solely composed of the *settled-living*, whose families, she explains, have steady jobs, stable relationships, and neat, clean homes.

While Calarco may not say it explicitly, it is clear that Calarco is letting the reader know that these working-class kids are not *trash*, as the characteristics she attributes to the *settled-living* are the opposite of the characteristics traditionally associated with *white trash*. She further explains that there are only a “few single-parents.”¹⁸⁸ And in case the reader was worried that this lack of family structure would generate *trash* culture, i.e. leisure, Calarco informs the reader that these single parents are in fact, “overwhelmed with responsibility.”¹⁸⁹ It is clear that Calarco is working hard to equate her working-class students to the middle class students. She ultimately sums up her description by further tying this settled-living group to a middle class culture: “Their efforts to teach their children closely paralleled those of two-parent families from similar class backgrounds.”¹⁹⁰ Through this narrative,

¹⁸⁵ pseudonym of a real school

¹⁸⁶ Calarco, J. M. 2014. “Coached For the Classroom: Parents' Cultural Transmission and Children's Reproduction of Educational Inequalities.” *American Sociological Review* 79(5):1015–37.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Calarco is attempting to distance her sample from the despised and disgusted *white trash*.

However, while Calarco's methodology desperately attempts to create similarities between the working-class and middle class students, her analysis reveals the opposite; despite the Defender's attempt to distance *white trash* from *trashy* behavior, there always remains the endorsement of values at the core of the discourse. Similarly, within the Defender's discourse always appears the alleged defiance of *white trash*. No matter how much Calarco attempts to portray her *settled-living* sample as *middle class*, the core of her argument is that there are *still* differences; they are *still* deviant.

Calarco attributes a "by-any-means" model for middle class students and a "no excuses" model for working-class students. The introduction of these terms alone speaks extensively to Calarco's approach.¹⁹¹ "By-any-means" hints extra work and a deep concern for this issue (education). On the other hand, "no excuses" immediately classifies this group as not caring. An excuse is an intentional, well thought out justification behind not doing something. To give no excuse means to put little effort in justifying why one did it; it is to do what one wants with little effort spent in justifying social norms and what *should* be done in an educational setting. Regardless of what happens, there is "no excuse;" Calarco suggests that they do not care, and it is this lack of caring that generates *elite* anxiety. The possibility that a group of individuals could dismiss the importance of a structure that was not created for them and was instead created to reproduce the perceived high status of the *elite* concerns the *mainstream*.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 7

Calarco further expands on this “no excuses model” by explaining that, “in light of their limited educational and occupational attainment, working-class parents generally trusted their school to decide what was best for their children.”¹⁹² Calarco continues with this theory to explain that a parent’s lack of education results in a lack of tools necessary to intervene in education issues. However, Calarco’s theory assumes the parent *wanted* the tools, in this case *elite* culture, to succeed in the current academic environment.

Calarco’s “by any means” model explains that *elite* culture is necessary for parents to intervene in difficult school situations and this is a culture that is passed on to *elite* children. This results in middle class children attaining a sense of “entitlement,” and questioning their teachers and “using their resources.” These are the qualities that, according to Calarco, allow the middle class to obtain an advantage in their educational experience. Calarco has created two groups, one that just asks for help and the other that gives “no excuses,” and she is arguing that the only difference between these two groups is that the parents did not have the opportunity to get the “educational and occupational attainment” to know to ask for help. However, Calarco’s desire to ensure the reader that the working-class has just unfortunately been unable to obtain these traits reflects true concern around one that may have never wanted these traits in the first place.

Furthermore, the mentality expressed by Calarco is just an endorsement of the qualities that the American Dream attempts to express: ask for help and you will be aided; work hard and you will be rewarded. The existence of the American Dream inherently justifies the *elite* position of the middle class. The alternative proposal,

¹⁹² Ibid., 8

“non-American Dream,” would mean that there is more than just hard work and asking for help that generates *elite* positions. Any suggestion that there is more than an individual, meritocratic justification for an *elite* standing would suggest that there is a greater, structural cause of social standings, which is exactly what the *elite* do not want. Thus, it is hardly a surprise that the middle class perpetuates these American Dream ideals, particularly through the education system.

Chapter 6

Work and Leisure

"Why so many people think the poor simply aren't working hard enough is unclear."¹⁹³

"It is not because they are working less. It is quite the opposite."¹⁹⁴

At the core of *white trash* discourse is *white trash's* relation to work. The anger towards *white trash* for being lazy and unwilling to work has existed for centuries.¹⁹⁵ On one hand, critics (Moralists) of poor whites explain that *white trash* people are lazy, unproductive, and unwilling to work. On the other hand, *white trash* Defenders are quick to point out that poor whites are not poor because they do not work, but rather as a result of greater societal issues. However, both arguments agree in their emphasis on the importance of work.

The Principal Source of Happiness

In *Coming Apart*, Murray explains that industriousness is reflective of a core American "assumption that life is to be spent getting ahead through hard work."¹⁹⁶ However, what does it mean to get *ahead*? Ahead in itself assumes a form of social hierarchy, a standing, and in order to get *ahead*, someone needs to be behind and to serve as the bottom of this social ladder. Thus, the immense amount of discourse that

¹⁹³ Feldman, R. "One in four Americans think poor people don't work hard enough." *The Washington Post*. October 9, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/10/09/one-in-four-americans-think-poor-people-dont-work-hard-enough/>

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Wray 2006

¹⁹⁶ Murray 2012:131

is prevalent in mainstream media is necessary to maintain a social boundary between the *worker* and the *nonworker*.

Murray argues that “American industriousness fascinated the rest of the world,”¹⁹⁷ and uses the following quotation from the German author Francis Grund as evidence.

Active occupation is not only the principal source of [the Americans’] happiness, and the foundation of their natural greatness, but they are absolutely wretched without it... [It] is the very soul of an American; he pursues it, not as a means of procuring for himself and his family the necessary comforts of life, but as the fountain of all human felicity.¹⁹⁸

This perception of America’s fascination with industriousness calls into question the purpose of *hard work*. Grund is suggesting that normally, *hard work* is done to “procure for himself and his family the necessary comforts of life,” which prioritizes not work, but rather the necessary consumption that comes with work. America distinguishes itself as Americans find happiness in work, as they do not work solely to provide for themselves and their families. Is American’s industriousness their “principal source of happiness?”

A glance at *mainstream* dialogue around hard work reflects a fetishization of “loving” work; it is at the core of the most successful: “they love to work.” In fact, look at some of the most successful *hardworkers*. In 2005, Richard St. John, “a self-described ‘average guy’ who found success doing what he loved,”¹⁹⁹ gave a TED Talk to discuss the work ethics of 500 “successful” people he interviewed.²⁰⁰ He called the people “workafrolic,” because they worked so hard even though they “loved” what

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ More about St. John can be found at https://www.ted.com/speakers/richard_st_john

²⁰⁰ St. John, R. “Why is pays to work hard.” *TEDEd*. Retrieved from <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/richard-st-john-why-it-pays-to-work-hard>

they did. For instance, he cites Oprah as saying that she “never sees daylight” and he talks about how his own success required “hard, 60-80 hour weeks.”

However, if he, Oprah, and other “workafrolics” truly love their work, then what makes it “hard?” The work is hard because “workafrolics” do not actually enjoy it. If work is a principal source of happiness, why is there a desire to vilify leisurely activity and the unwillingness to work? If anything, *white trash*, then, should be pitied, not demonized, for distancing themselves from work, as they would be the “wretched” without their work; they would be deprived of all happiness.

Work is not loved, as both the *elite* and *white trash* abhor work. However, the *elite* concern is that the *elite* work, whereas *white trash* do not, and the *elite* despise *white trash* for it. It is presumably easier to work less than 60-80 hours and to see the sunlight, but to do the opposite is “hard.” One would do this not because they *love* what they do, but rather because of what comes as a result: money, success, fame—all of which are status symbols.

Not working is the sin, and the *reformed sinner* must distinguish himself from his past self, the *nonworker*. For instance, in 2013, Fox Business host John Stossel argued that people should not donate money to the homeless, because it would only make the donors “enablers.”²⁰¹ Stossel pointed out that homeless beggars could make up to \$23,000 a year, and he feared that they would spend that money primarily on food and alcohol. However, these remarks bring up the following questions. First, why does Stossel care what the “homeless” man spends the money on, and why should the public care? In addition, if begging can be so profitable, as Stossel argues

²⁰¹ Keyes, S. “Fox News Chastises People For Giving To The Homeless: ‘You’re An Enabler.’” *Think Progress*. November 21, 2013. Retrieved from <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2013/11/21/2977711/john-stossel-poor-people/>

it is, then why does Stossel not just quit his job as Fox Business host and become a beggar?

The beggar brings to light two *white trash* sins. First is the issue of consumption, particularly when the *nonworker* can consume without the work, e.g. spending money on alcohol and drugs. Second is status, as Stossel would not want to be a beggar because it is reflective of low-status.

Consumption Without Work

Stossel's concern regarding the beggar's purchases is clear: the beggar consumes without working. Because *mainstream* hates work, it is concerning to see the *nonworker* still enjoy the same pleasures as the *worker*. The *worker* works for more than just the necessary comforts of life, as argued by Murray and Grund, so the *worker* should consume more than just what is necessary. However, when the *worker* finds that the *nonworker* is similarly consuming more, the *worker's* own work seems pointless. However, if this work genuinely provided happiness, then this would be of no concern as the *worker* would be happy, but he is not, because work is not America's "principal source of happiness;" status is.

This desire to regulate the consumption of *white trash* is particularly related to consumption that has utility other than status. For instance, there are a lot of anxieties concerning what food is purchased with food stamps. In June of 2013, Louie Gohmert, Texas Republican Representative, told a story to the House of Representatives about "a hardworking constituent who'd been in line behind someone using food stamps to buy crab legs" while the "hardworking constituent" could not

afford them.²⁰² He told this story to support reducing welfare benefits, presumably because it would not be fair to allow the *nonworking* to consume the same amount, if not more, as the *worker*.

This dispute is similarly used to attack *white trash* for owning smart phones and other luxuries.²⁰³ These items are fun and wanted, so the *mainstream* perception is that they should be limited to those that *work hard*. Otherwise, *white trash* is the perfect lifestyle for those that want to consume and not work, so why do the *elite* not embrace the *white trash* lifestyle? It is not because the *elite* love work, but rather because they love status. Since *white trash* will consume some of the more enjoyable items on the market (iPhones), *mainstream* desperately needs to find a way to distinguish themselves from *white trash*, as *elites* are dependent on being perceived as having a higher status. As a result, they rely on consuming status symbols, and *white trash* is marked for neglecting these status symbols.

Forgoing the Work of Status

The *hardworking* despise the beggar, because the beggar appears as a blatant disregard for status, and thus a refusal to demonstrate one's *hard work*. The beggar is not only low-status, but also someone that is actively trying to grab the attention of the *mainstream*. The concern is not that *white trash* only rejects *hardwork* and status, but that they do so in an explicit manner. This concern is recurring and appears at the

²⁰² Delaney, A. and Emily Swanson. "Americans Feel Strongly About How Poor People Should Spend Their Food Stamps." *The Huffington Post*. August 16, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/16/food-stamp-poll_n_3763755.html

²⁰³ Wanjuki, W. 2015. "What one man's anger can teach us about the way we treat welfare recipients." *Upworthy*. December 18, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.upworthy.com/what-one-mans-anger-can-teach-us-about-the-way-we-treat-welfare-recipients>

core of many discussions surrounding *white trash*, such as dirty/messy lawns, relationships with animals, and trailers.

Lawns

Around late 1860's, a lawn served as a class marker and a way to further distinguish middle class landowners from their low-status peers.²⁰⁴ A grass lawn represented a regional marker, as the yards of *white trash* were dirt, clay, or sand, and it was common in these areas to toss trash out the front and back doors with seemingly little interest in maintaining a clean yard. On the other hand, areas with grass in the yard were used for horses and cows to graze. Thus, the Southern lawns were drastically different than the elite lawn. As time progressed, *mainstream* intentionally moved away from lawns as a form of economic utility and instead used lawns to demonstrate conspicuous consumption and to show their peers they were “aesthetically advanced.”²⁰⁵ Lawns were for beauty, not for animals.

Immediately following World War II, lawns became critical in the development of middle class neighborhoods all over the nation. Since then, lawns have served as more than just a demonstration of affluence and are now an “outward sign of a homeowner’s work ethic, love of family, and respect for property values.”²⁰⁶ Maintaining a lawn does not only require money, it also requires work and maintenance (either one’s own work or paying one to do the work) and *elites* that put in that work depend on recognition of this work as a way to maintain their superior

²⁰⁴ Jenkins, Virginia Scott. 1994. *The Lawn: a History of an American Obsession*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

²⁰⁵ Hoy 1995: 143

²⁰⁶ Whitney, Kristoffer. 2010. “Living Lawns, Dying Waters: The Suburban Boom, Nitrogenous Fertilizers, And the Nonpoint Source Pollution Dilemma.” *Technology and Culture* 51(3), 655.

social status. If clean lawns are no longer perceived as valuable, then it is harder to distinguish between *white* and *white trash*.



Messy lawns are social markers for *white trash*. In fact, a Google search of “*white trash* lawns” immediately presents a lawn filled with various kinds of trash, as shown in the picture above.²⁰⁷ Another example can be seen in the portrayal of Robert Dear, a suspect for the 2015 murders at Planned Parenthood. Dear was deemed *white trash* by his neighbors because his yard “look[ed] like *white trash* living at its finest, like a bomb went off and everything was thrown in the air.”²⁰⁸ The failure to maintain the beauty of one’s lawn generates *elite* concerns, but it is also more than just dirt that bothers *elites*; the *type* of mess is also an issue.

One common *white trash* stereotype is owning a yard with “rusted out cars”²⁰⁹ and “more cars on blocks on the front lawn than teeth in your head.”²¹⁰ In fact, the book *American Stereotypes*, specifically describes *white trash* yards as yards with

²⁰⁷ Image found on *Pinterest*. Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/57702438946214283/>

²⁰⁸ Polite, D. “Planned Parenthood Gunman hints at Motive: ‘No More Baby Parts.’” *Slate*. November 29, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2015/11/29/planned_parenthood_gunman_hints_at_motive_no_more_baby_parts.html

²⁰⁹ “White Trash Yards: More Complex Than Goats and Rusty Cars.” 2010. Retrieved from <http://andyrupert.blogspot.com/2010/11/white-trash-yards-more-complex-than.html>

²¹⁰ Found from a thread on Reddit. Retrieved from https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/3jd5ru/what_do_you_consider_white_trash/

"old cars." Furthermore, William McCarter, author of *Homo Redneckus*, explains that the threat to the beauty of America's countryside is "us *rednecks* who insist on cluttering up nature with double wide trailers and use our junk cars and broken appliances as lawn ornaments."²¹¹ Broken down cars on the yard is a distinct *white trash* marker.

Broken down cars pose an ideological threat to affluent neighbors, as broken cars are a visible rejection of middle class fascination with clean lawns. Cars are a reflection of productivity, because cars are traditionally used to get from one place to another. A broken car is the epitome of "not working" and the rejection of productivity. Broken cars are very apparent, aggressively demanding attention, and a public display of a lack of productivity. Furthermore, waste is meant to be hidden, and a broken car is not only a public display of waste but an excessive amount of waste. This excess is a recurring concern regarding *white trash*.

Animals

As previously mentioned, grass lawns were originally intended to feed farm animals, such as horses and cows. However as time passed, the perception of yards as utilitarian declined, and *elites* attempted to distance themselves from animals and their food. In fact, Thorstein Veblen claimed "grazing animals were no longer acceptable on lawns in the late nineteenth century" because they were "too suggestive of thrift and usefulness."²¹² As a result, lawns were to be removed of anything that

²¹¹ McCarter, William Matthew. 2012. *Homo Redneckus: on Being Not Qwhite in America*. New York: Algora Pub, 10

²¹² Jenkins 1994: 143

one needed to consume, and instead serve as solely a reflection of prestige and social power.

White trash lawns, however, are depicted as having “strange farm animals such as goats, alpaca and chicken coups.”²¹³ While *white trash* culture is tied to antisocial behavior with *elites*, *white trash* people are a bit *too* social with animals, particularly animals they are going to eat. The presence of these characteristics aligns with the relationship between perceptions of low-status whites as more primitive.²¹⁴ As a result, *white trash* are further dehumanized and perceived as not only too social with animals, but animal-like themselves, as *savages*, a reflection of backwardness in social development.²¹⁵ This dehumanization works through the anxieties mentioned earlier, as these activities are viewed as stupid, dirty, and sexually unrestrained.

Pets Are Friends, Not Food

While mainstream culture believes that farm animals are no longer appropriate for the home, there are definitely animals that are allowed at home: pets. To be able to take care of an animal over the course of its life and not consume it is the ultimate demonstration of economic affluence. However, people that ignore this distance between animals as friends/family and animals as food are targeted and marked as *white trash*. For instance, the rabbit lady in *Roger and Me* and Honey Boo Boo have been targeted for raising an animal only to potentially eat it or sell it to be eaten. However, the purpose of this topic is not that of the general animal rights discourse,

²¹³ Miller, B. “American White Trash.” *Worthy of Publishing*. 2012. Retrieved from http://www.worthyofpublishing.com/chapter.asp?chapter_ID=94780

²¹⁴ Loughnan, Steve, Nick Haslam, Robbie M. Sutton, and Bettina Spencer. 2014. “Dehumanization And Social Class.” *Social Psychology* 45(1):54–61.; Wray 2006

²¹⁵ Loughnan, S, Nick Hallam, Robbie Sutton, and Bettina Spencer 2014

as most Americans eat meat, but rather to target the relationship between the person and the meat they eat.

In 1989, Michael Moore released a documentary, *Roger and Me*, about “the closure of General Motors’ plant at Flint, Michigan, which resulted in the loss of 30,000 jobs.”²¹⁶ One infamous scene in the documentary was that of a rabbit lady who held a sign that said “Pets or Meat,” referring to her business that sold rabbits as pets or meat. Further on in the film, the woman skins a rabbit right in front of the filmmakers, which sickened viewers.²¹⁷ Moore’s purpose in this scene was to demonstrate that the abundance of poverty in Michigan after the closure of GM resulted in a city that was “like a third-world country.”²¹⁸ His goal was to both pity and make a mockery of *white trash* culture.

There were two types of responses to Moore’s depiction of the rabbit lady:²¹⁹ disgust and pity.²²⁰ However, Moore’s portrayal of the rabbit lady could only be mockery if one endorsed the social values of distinguishing between animals that are to be eaten and animals that are pets, which is the same mentality that elicits disgust from viewers. People that attempted to defend the rabbit lady attacked Moore for “exploring the working-class characters” and “lower-echelon functionaries,” stating

²¹⁶ More about *Roger and Me* can be found on IMDB:
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098213/plotsummary>

²¹⁷ “Reviews and Ratings.” *IMDB*. Retrieved from
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098213/reviews?start=90>

²¹⁸ Moore’s quote can be found in McKee, J. “Michael Moore talks about ‘Roger and Me’ and more at U-M.” *The Ann Arbor News*. March 19, 2010. Retrieved from
<http://www.annarbor.com/entertainment/michael-moore-story/>

²¹⁹ I’ve called this woman “rabbit lady” to demonstrate media’s depiction of her. This woman was not an individual but rather a representation of *white trash* culture that kills rabbits.

²²⁰ Gawande, A. “SICK AND TWISTED.” *The New Yorker*. July 23, 2007. Retrieved from
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/07/23/sick-and-twisted>

that the scene of the rabbit lady was a reflection of a “struggle to survive.”²²¹ On one hand, there are the *elite*, who are affluent and not struggling, and on the other hand, is the *white trash* whose behavior can only be justified as a *struggle to survive*.

However, the rabbit lady was not the one anxious about rabbit killing, and in fact, her business was “thriving.”²²² This is important, as it is a sign that people are consuming the killed rabbit, and people are actually supporting this business. Thus, arguing that the rabbit lady is struggling only further reinforces this mentality that the *elite* are superior in their ability to distance themselves from their food and is hardly critiquing sources that cite *white trash* as primitive. The primitive nature of this act is not in question, but rather *why* they would engage in this behavior is the point of contention, demonstrating anxieties concerning killing animals that should be “pets” as opposed to food.

A similar scenario occurred after Honey Boo Boo got a pet pig named Glitzy on her hit television show, *Honey Boo Boo*. In this episode, Honey Boo Boo stated, “I hope Mama don’t eat Glitzy. She eats everything else,” and another daughter yelled, “She was gonna eat it! It looked like a hot dog to her. A burnt hot dog.”²²³ In response, Tim Goodman, writer for *The Hollywood Reporter*, stated, “Yep. We’re there. At that depth where no one imagined we’d go.”²²⁴ What caused this media attention, and what was Goodman meaning by “depth?” It surely was not eating pigs,

²²¹ Bernstein, Matthew. 2010. *Michael Moore: Filmmaker, Newsmaker, Cultural Icon*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 85

²²² Canby, V. 1989. “FILM FESTIVAL; A Twainlike Twist for Flint, Mich.” *The New York Times*. September 27, 1989. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=950DE2DC143EF934A1575AC0A96F948260>

²²³ Goodman, T. “‘Honey Boo Boo’: That Joke Isn’t Funny Anymore.” *The Hollywood Reporter*. August 22, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bastard-machine/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-alana-mama-364933>

²²⁴ Ibid.

as that is nothing new in America, and the media covering *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* are popular media outlets, not animal rights activists, so it is unlikely that they would be targeting eating pigs in general. Instead, the comments targeted Honey Boo Boo for not understanding the line between *pet* and *food*, and implied her primitive nature. In fact, the media has been trying to portray Honey Boo Boo's family as animals since the show began. Rob Lavine, author for *The Guardian*, called them a "different species altogether."²²⁵ *South Park* capitalized on this portrayal by having an episode in which Honey Boo Boo literally became a pig and played in the mud, because that is how popular media views Honey Boo Boo: as a pig herself.

Savages

The relationship between the affluent and the pet is so far distanced from *animals as food* that pets are equated with family. Once a person takes a living animal into their home, it shifts from food to family, and *white trash* is characterized as deviating from this traditional relationship. In fact, the relationship between *white trash* and animals has aided in portraying *white trash* as savage and unrestrained, and this portrayal has influenced perceptions of guilt in murder and rape cases. Often, when an individual is perceived as *white trash*, prosecutors and the media focus on their relationship with animals to prove their guilt, independent of the evidence relevant to the court case. This facilitates a dialogue of, "of course he killed/raped her, because he harmed/killed animals."

²²⁵ Lavine, R. "The harsh reality behind Here Comes Honey Boo Boo." *The Guardian*. May 20, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/20/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-harsh-reality>

Two of the most popular court cases this past year were those of Steven Avery. He was wrongfully convicted of rape and spent eighteen years in prison, and a large part of the media portrayal of Avery was painting him as *white trash*. After being freed, Avery was again convicted of a crime, yet this time it was murder. While many pieces of his trial and later guilty verdict are controversial and a point of contention, media outlets have prioritized his past abuse of a cat over the alleged murder of a woman. For instance, Lesley Messer of *ABC News* put Steven Avery's killing of the cat as number two in her list of *5 Things to Know About Steven Avery*.²²⁶ Why would this be something that the general public needs to know about Steven Avery? They need to know because it is a marker for *white trash* and Messer is ensuring the public knows that Avery is *white trash*. Furthermore, Stephanie Merry of *The Washington Post* claims that the writers of *Making a Murderer* "glossed over crucial facts" such as "Avery went to prison for animal cruelty."²²⁷ However, this animal cruelty has nothing to do with the court cases that the writers were covering, but Merry is a representation of mainstream culture's anxieties surrounding animal relations. Part of her argument for presenting this evidence in her article is that Avery should not be a sympathetic character, because Avery is *white trash*. As a result, the mentality that comes across from these arguments is *of course* he is guilty, and with approaches like these, it comes as no surprise that Avery was falsely convicted. Mainstream media has a fascination with vilifying *white trash* as a result of their divergence from traditional norms.

²²⁶ Messer, L. "5 Things to Know About Steven Avery From 'Making A Murderer.'" *ABC News*. January 5, 2016. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/things-steven-avery-making-murderer/story?id=36090236>

²²⁷ Merry, S. "How listening to 'Serial' made us doubt 'Making a Murderer.'" *The Washington Post*. January 6, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/01/06/how-listening-to-serial-made-us-doubt-making-a-murderer/>

Similarly, the West Memphis 3 were painted as devil worshipping murderers and the media often claimed that these boys slaughtered dogs.²²⁸ The media was presenting this as evidence that the kids raped and mutilated three young boys and equating the crimes against dogs as crimes against children. The West Memphis Three were wrongfully convicted of the murders and sentenced to life in prison, and one was sentenced to death. They served eighteen years in prison for a crime they did not commit.

On a similar note, the prosecutor against Cameron Todd Willingham accused him of murdering his children and stated that he “murdered and tortured animals.”²²⁹ Willingham was sentenced to death and executed in 2004, and new evidence suggests that Willingham was in fact innocent. In all of these crimes, the media equated animal abuse with murder, and each time, the media was wrong. Perhaps these men did abuse animals, but no one is accusing every local butcher of murdering children and women. *The mainstream* is concerned about the relationship between *white trash* and animals, and this anxiety is reflected in the consistent portrayal of *white trash* as murderers, because of their past “animal abuse.” *White trash* people are further described as *savages* as a result of their relationship with animals. More specifically, they not only behave like animals, but also physically interact with non-pet animals.

Hillbilly Handfishing

Hillbilly Handfishing, also called *noodling*, is a type of fishing in which the fisherman uses only his hands to capture fish, typically catfish in an underwater

²²⁸ Star, P. “Horrorific child sex slayings an intriguing mystery.” *The Toronto Star*. 1997.

²²⁹ ““Total idiots” in Corsicana Strike Back at Scientific Reports that Todd Willingham Fire Was Not Arson.” September 8, 2009. Retrieved from <http://camerontoddwillingham.com/?p=84>

cave/hole, and is perceived as especially primitive. *Hillbilly Fishing* deviates from traditional fishing, because the *hillbilly* fisherman does not use a fishing pole and actually goes under the water with the fish. This activity is common in the Southern United States, largely because it is mostly illegal outside of the South. Opponents of noodling argue that it is “not fair” to the catfish, because the fish does not have the chance to “swim away,”²³⁰ but there is not nearly as much concern for fish that are caught by being trapped in nets and having no chance of swimming away. This is because, as argued by Donald Jackson, a professor at Mississippi State University, “the tension between the two groups is cultural,” i.e. *mainstream* and *white trash*, as “the fish doesn’t care how it dies.”²³¹

Instead, the issue is that noodling almost feels like cheating compared to *elite* fishing. For example, fly-fishing is stereotypically reserved for the *elite*.²³² Whereas noodling requires the fisherman go into the home and literally just grab the catfish, *elite* fishing takes much longer and more work/patience. In fact, it takes years to master and is physically exhausting. The fisherman stands in the water patiently waiting for the bite.²³³

Furthermore, the scenery is completely different for each type of fishing. Noodling requires that the fisherman dive fully under water into muddy holes, which is messy, another common stereotype of *white trash*. In addition, many areas ban noodling for being *too* messy and placing more physical junk into the water, such as

²³⁰ Whitehall, E. “In the Jaws of a Catfish.” *The New York Times*. April 21, 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/21/travel/escapes/21noodle.html?pagewanted=print>

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Erdorsy, M. “The Lure of Fly Fishing.” *Answers*. Retrieved from <http://www.sharethison.org/article/1142594/the-lure-of-fly-fishing>

²³³ Grossman, D. “FRIDAYS ON THE FLY: FLY FISHING 101.” *Blue Ridge Outdoors*. October 09, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.blueridgeoutdoors.com/fly-fishing/fly-fishing-101/>

tires for catfish to nest in.²³⁴ In contrast, the fly fisherman only puts his feet into the water and the surrounding area is absolutely beautiful.²³⁵ In fact, the clear waters and beautiful forests are just as important to fly-fishing as the fish is. *Redneck* fishing is about the fish; *elite* fishing is about the scenery and Instagram pictures that aid in portraying status.

The concerns surrounding *white trash* are also clear in how these fishermen are described. For instance, Keith Sutton, an author for ESPN, describes that “none would deny, however, that those who catch catfish bare-handed are a special breed.”²³⁶ An article in the *Wall Street Journal* explains that opponents “want to paint people who do this as lower than a snake’s belly in a wagon rut.”²³⁷ The article also features a Defender who fights back, claiming that “not everyone who noodles is an uneducated, toothless *hillbilly*”²³⁸ because he is a college graduate and has all his teeth. This Defender is thus reinforcing social standings in which the *redneck* is positioned beneath him.

On the other hand, fly-fishing is for the *elite*. Shane Tritsch, journalist for *Crain's Chicago Business*, calls fly-fishing the "new golf" as business analysts are

²³⁴ Graham, B. “CONSERVATION AGENTS THWART ILLEGAL CATFISH NOODLING.” *Missouri Department of Conservation*. August 31, 2011. Retrieved from <http://mdc.mo.gov/newsroom/conservation-agents-thwart-illegal-catfish-noodling>

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Sutton, K. “Out There: A baptism! Noodling for catfish.” *ESPN*. April 25, 2006. Retrieved from http://espn.go.com/outdoors/general/columns/story?columnist=sutton_keith&page=g_col_sutton_noodling

²³⁷ Campy, A. “Long Arm of the Law Penalizes Texans Who Nab Catfish by Hand.” *The Wall Street Journal*. May 16, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703864204576321940917861336?cb=logged0.7590069412253797>

²³⁸ Ibid.

beginning to take their clients on fishing trips rather than golfing.²³⁹ This has led to the design of many new lodges to host businessman and their clients,²⁴⁰ and this is clearly not a *white trash* activity.

Handfishing has been explicitly linked to *redneck* culture through an annual fishing tournament called “the *Redneck* Fishing Tournament.” In this tournament, fishing poles are not allowed, and it is illegal to return fish, two major characteristics of *redneck* fishing. *Redneck* fishing differs from catch-and-release fishing in that catch-and-release reflects economic affluence. Similar to moving away from having animals on the lawn, catch-and-release distinguishes one from fishing as a sport and fishing for economic necessity. Catching fish to eat is the act of the lower-status whites, the *redneck*.

Bass Pro

In 2015, Memphis transformed its Pyramid, historically used for basketball games and concerts, into a Bass Pro Shop, a store that sells fishing and hunting gear. There were a slew of media responses about the new “icon of *redneck* culture,”²⁴¹ as Twitter erupted with negative responses. One user, named Kallan D., wrote, “am I the only one who finds it super embarrassing that Memphis is turning the pyramid into a bass pro?”²⁴²

²³⁹ Tritsch, S. “Is fly-fishing the new golf?” *Crain’s Chicago Business*. July 31, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20130731/NEWS07/130739979/is-fly-fishing-the-new-golf>

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*

²⁴¹ Peckerar, M. “Memphis Pyramid Is Now A Bass Pro Shops Since Rednecks Need A Mecca.” *Rantplaces*. April 30, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.rantplaces.com/2015/04/30/memphis-pyramid-is-now-a-bass-pro-shops-since-rednecks-need-a-mecca/>

²⁴² Written by Twitter user Kallan D. Found in “Bass Pro Shops to Add a Memphis Pyramid to Its Business Empire.” *The New York Times*. December 4, 2014. Retrieved from

The concerns around the new shopping mall are captured in a *New York Times* article, in which Christian Dalton is cited as stating, “I consider Memphis to be a cultural center, and I think that if you put a giant *redneck* hub in the middle of it, you’re going to dilute all of that.”²⁴³ Similar to the arguments of Murray, Dalton and other Bass Pro critics fear that *redneck* culture is contagious, and it will deplete the *real* culture that is in Memphis. Alissa Walker of *Gizmodo*, called the new store a reflection of “humanity’s pending doom.”²⁴⁴ In addition, the Bass Pro Shop has a hotel in it, where the visitors are literally living right next to animals, such as alligators and thousands of fish. The anxieties concerning *white trash* people being *too* close to fish is turning into a physical reality, as one of Memphis’s biggest tourist locations houses people and fish.

Even defenders of Bass Pro are quick to calm anxieties concerning a rise in *redneck*²⁴⁵ culture. In the *Memphis Magazine*, Tom Jones explains that “there’s a lack of pretension, conceit, and guile that lies at the heart of Memphis,” but in the same article discusses the fear that the new people coming to Memphis are *redneck*.²⁴⁶ Jones, a Defender, claims that people should not “dismiss these immigrants as country bumpkins or to categorize hunting and fishing as *redneck* sports,” as that would be “dismissive of ourselves.” In this statement, Jones is critiquing *rednecks*, and distancing Memphis from *redneck* culture. Furthermore, Jones claims, “it is

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/04/us/bass-pro-shops-to-add-a-memphis-pyramid-to-its-business-empire.html?_r=0

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Walker, A. “A Bass Pro Shop in a Pyramid is Surely a Sign That The World Is Ending.” *Gizmodo*. April 29, 2015. Retrieved from <http://gizmodo.com/a-bass-pro-shop-in-a-pyramid-is-surely-a-sign-that-the-1701005438>

²⁴⁵ again, while *redneck* is the commonly used term in these discussions, *redneck* serve the same role as a boundary term as *white trash*.

²⁴⁶ Jones, T. “Bass Pro Pride.” *Memphis The City Magazine*. June 1, 2015. Retrieved from <http://memphismagazine.com/features/columns/bass-pro-pride/>

impossible to be dismissive of this influx of people into downtown Memphis by referring to the color of their necks. After all, it is the color of their money that matters.”²⁴⁷ Jones suggests here that *redneck* culture is no longer a danger to Memphis as long as it brings in enough money.

Bass Pro as a whole is a threat to bringing in *redneck* culture to Memphis, but particularly *redneck* sports, such as hunting and fishing. These sports are classified as *redneck* because they “require little physical exertion.”²⁴⁸ Aligning with the general anxiety that *rednecks* are lazy and unproductive, *redneck* sports are perceived to be lazy. The *mainstream* are concerned that Bass Pro may receive more customers and attention than the Pyramid as an arena for basketball games ever did. People actually like leisurely activities, and *mainstream* is attempting to promote this lack of productivity as *redneck* or *white trash* and not the mainstream, traditional culture.

Moonshine and the Creation of NASCAR

“Remember when we learned what NASCAR stood for?”

“huh?”

“Non Athletic Sport Centered Around Rednecks.”

-Anonymous

Similar to hunting and fishing, NASCAR has a history of being a *redneck/white trash* sport. *White trash*'s obsession with fast cars stems from the Prohibition era, when poor whites were the main producers and sellers of moonshine.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, *white trash* people *consumed* the moonshine, which was

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Peckerar, M. “Memphis Pyramid Is Now A Bass Pro Shops Since Rednecks Need A Mecca.” *Rantplaces*. April 30, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.rantplaces.com/2015/04/30/memphis-pyramid-is-now-a-bass-pro-shops-since-rednecks-need-a-mecca/>

²⁴⁹ Thompson, Neal. 2006. *Driving With the Devil: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR*. New York: Crown Publishers.

a guilty pleasure of the *elite*. Consuming alcohol was a defiance of productivity and an ultimate reflection of leisurely activity; more importantly, consuming alcohol led to reckless, illegal activity. The good, law-abiding *elites* were concerned that *white trash* not only broke the laws, but also did not care about laws, particularly laws that were preventing them from fun; they worried that *white trash* broke the very laws that the *elites* wish they could break themselves.

Furthermore, *white trash* men would use Ford V-8s to outrun law enforcement during their moonshine deliveries. *White trash* were perceived to be savages who had no understanding of morality and law enforcement. In fact, the mainstream discourse about *white trash* and moonshine suggests that *white trash* took pleasure in running from the law; they seemingly loved the fast cars and the thrill of the escape from police. Moonshine production and sales, along with outrunning law enforcement, were viewed as immoral by the government, but *white trash* seemingly had no qualms with disagreeing with the general public's interpretation of morality.²⁵⁰

Mainstream culture promotes an ideology that one should not break the law, but rather challenge and vote against what they do not support; *white trash* apparently skip the challenging and voting and they do not play by the rules, with little concern over the legality of their behavior. Interestingly enough, Prohibition ended, so rather than criminals, *white trash* were arguably leaders.

Thus, that which was previously illegal became less of a concern after Prohibition ended. However, the legacy of bootlegging²⁵¹ persisted, as *white trash* remained fascinated in fast cars and racing, which led to the creation of NASCAR.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 58

²⁵¹ "bootlegging" was the term often used for the illegal transportation of moonshine.

Over seventy years later, NASCAR is still perceived to be a *white trash* or *redneck* sport. However, the term “sport” has been widely challenged as critics of NASCAR argue that it is not a sport, because the drivers just “going in circles over and over again,”²⁵² and that is the concern: cars in NASCAR do not go *anywhere*. Unlike the unproductive broken cars in the frown lawn, NASCAR cars are fully functioning but they are not used for what cars *should* be used for: to get from one place to another. The fear is that *white trash*’s disregard for productivity extends so far that their choice of entertainment is a sport devoted to non-productivity.

The irony is that NASCAR is no longer only watched by *rednecks*, as the dominant fan group is “college-educated, middle-aged, middle class homeowners; nearly half are women.”²⁵³ Furthermore, NASCAR is a multibillion-dollar industry that is constantly trying to expand away from the perception of a “Southern sport” and entice a new, more diverse fan base.²⁵⁴ However, despite the fan base, the sport still attracts the “visceral, animal, sexual romp of power and noise”²⁵⁵ and is a clear defiance of productivity, and until the sport moves from these notions, NASCAR will always be *white trash*; it will always be a guilty pleasure.

Trailer Parks

This anxiety around low levels of consumption is reflective in the projection of trailer parks as trashy, and sometimes even evil. *White trash* is so connected to trailers that the term is synonymous with *trailer trash*. The stigma around trailers is

²⁵² Emmett, P. “Even NASCAR Drivers are Bored with NASCAR.” *Sports Jeer*. August 8, 2013. Retrieved from <http://sportsjeer.com/2013/08/08/nascar-drivers-bored-nascar/>

²⁵³ Thompson 2006: 7

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 360

that they are cheap, run-down, and owned by poor, uneducated people.²⁵⁶ “Poor and uneducated people” is of course just another symbol for *white trash*, but characteristics such as “cheap” and “run-down” are reflective of status. “Cheap” implies lower status, and the fear is that *white trash* is okay with this lower status. More importantly, this disinterest in status may justify *white trash’s* seemingly disinterest in work; care less about status and one can work less to portray that status. Houses require *work* to maintain, but “run-down,” is reflective of not doing the work necessary to maintain the home. It is instead reflective of excessive leisure with little interest in portraying status. As a result, even Defenders of trailer parks argue that not everyone in trailer parks is *trailer trash*, just those that “could not or did not make improvements to their homes.”²⁵⁷

Michael Madden's review of the film *8-Mile* explains that Rabbit, a character used to represent Eminem, is living a “stuck” life and is in a “trailer park-y trailer park.”²⁵⁸ This use of “trailer parky” to explain a type of trailer park is just a politically correct way of saying *white trash*. Madden is arguing that not all trailer parks are created equal, and this trailer park is particularly poor, representing *stuckness* and is a barrier preventing Eminem from his desire to achieve social mobility. He continues by explaining that “nothing is going right in this household,” but Madden's interpretation of “right” is one that is directly related to mobility and higher status. Rabbit, on one hand is attempting to do more, work harder, consume more, and this

²⁵⁶ Crystal. “Stereotype Myths of Mobile Homes.” *Mobile + Manufactured Home Living*. September 9, 2011. Retrieved from <http://mobilehomeliving.org/stereotype-myths-of-mobile-homes/>

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Madden, M. “The Other Side of 8 Mile: Discovering the Real Marshall Mathers In 2012, did the Real Slim Shady stand up?” *Consequence of Sound*. July 30, 2014. Retrieved from <http://consequenceofsound.net/2014/07/the-other-side-of-8-mile-discovering-the-real-marshall-mathers/>

physical barrier is representation of a world that has no desire to do more and is potentially content with working less to consume less. Rabbit is portrayed as the victim of the contagion that Murray warns of.

Thus, the concerns regarding trailers exist in the trailer's display of lower status. Of course, large homes are reflective of status. But there are also elite tiny homes that are very similar to trailers: cheaper, smaller, and portable. The consumer, on the other hand, is drastically different. Tiny homes reflect a desire to demonstrate "simple living,"²⁵⁹ but still display status. This presentation of living simply is demonstrating that one *could* live "less simply" but rather chose to live simply to distance oneself from a dependency on high status, but even this move is still a status move. Otherwise, elite tiny home owners would own trailers, because trailers are cheaper. While trailers are heavily critiqued, tiny homes receive overly positive feedback and are described as better for one's mental health and the environment.²⁶⁰

However, this desperate attempt to maintain green lawns, nice homes, and distance from animals is nothing more than *elite* desire to maintain *elite* standing. It demonstrates their *need* and dependence on their own social standing and consumption levels. In order to maintain these privileges, *elites* need to disavow leisure and project the desire to be *lazy* onto *white trash*.

²⁵⁹ Raymor, M. "14 Tiny Houses That Make Simple Living Stylish." *Mashable*. August 4, 2014. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2014/08/04/tiny-houses/#dVJh5HQNmMQR>

²⁶⁰ Alberts, H. "The 5 Coolest tiny homes in America." *New York Post*. October 14, 2015. Retrieved from <http://nypost.com/2015/10/14/tour-5-of-americas-coolest-tiny-homes/>

Obesity

“Excess is meaning out of control. It inundates the ‘needs’ of the dominant ideology and control, spills its tackiness out into the open and refuses to be ignored. Excess aggressively calls attention to itself: the excessive body refuses to be ignored. The White Trash body is, by definition, an excessive body.”²⁶¹

Gael Sweeney argues that the *white trash* body is an excessive body. *White trash*’s seemingly lack of concern for *mainstream* values is present in their presentation of their own body, serving as a potential rejection of social norms. *White trash* obesity is just another way that this rejection may occur and can be seen in many popular media portrayals of *white trash*, particularly *Honey Boo Boo*. In an article for *The Guardian*, Rob Lavine states that the “camera will linger on the overweight and slovenly people” depicting “an entire part of America.”²⁶² This “editing and framing of the show” presents “not so much a different class, but practically a different species.” The issue here, as Lavine and other authors point out is that it is hard to “show a sympathetic depiction of its characters” and is instead “exploiting them.” Lavine is playing the role of the *white trash* Defender and is trying to explain that *white trash* cannot help their obesity, but again, this only reinforces obesity as deviant.

Thus, it is hard to present *white trash* as poor, helpless individuals when they have such lack of restraint. Levine is upset that the show is unwilling to hide what *white trash* allegedly will not: obesity. At the core of the obesity discourse is that

²⁶¹ Sweeney 1997 in Wray & Newitz 1997: 255

²⁶² Lavine, R. 2013. “The harsh reality behind Here Comes Honey Boo Boo.” *The Guardian*. May 20, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/20/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-harsh-reality>

obesity is, as *Honey Boo Boo* critics call it, “the product of a lack of discipline.”²⁶³ This is another way that *white trash* is marked for lack of productivity. The *elite* fear that *white trash* people do not work and that they publicly portray this lack of productivity through their obese, excessive bodies. Thus, while Lavine and other *white trash* Defenders will attempt to cover up the obesity, the real anxiety is that Honey Boo Boo and her family make no effort to hide it.

For example, a substantial amount of the media representation of Honey Boo Boo focuses on the fact that she publicly portrays weight in shows that were created to implement social control around bodies and reward individuals who were able to maintain social norms: beauty pageants. Often, the critique of Honey Boo Boo’s performance in pageants²⁶⁴ critiques child pageants in general, but it is no accident that Honey Boo Boo is the most critiqued in a show that includes many children. Honey Boo Boo is particularly targeted as a result of her size. In fact, her alleged resistance to body policing is so anti-mainstream, that authors equate her to non-humans, to animals and “other species.”²⁶⁵

It is not just Honey Boo Boo whose weight is targeted. Critics of the show consistently refer to Mama June as “obese” and “massively overweight.”²⁶⁶ One article even highlights an example in which Mama June’s “three overweight daughters” say, “that crust on my mama’s neck,” highlighting “an egregious amount

²⁶³ Hays, C. “When did white trash become normal?” *New York Post*. November 2, 2013. Retrieved from <http://nypost.com/2013/11/02/when-did-white-trash-become-normal/>

²⁶⁴ Honey Boo Boo first starred on the television show, *Toddlers and Tiaras*, which depicts several young girls participating in fashion shows.

²⁶⁵ Lavine, R. 2013. “The harsh reality behind Here Comes Honey Boo Boo.” *The Guardian*. May 20, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/20/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-harsh-reality>

²⁶⁶ Goodman, T. “‘Honey Boo Boo’: That Joke Isn’t Funny Anymore.” *The Hollywood Reporter*. August 22, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bastard-machine/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-alana-mama-364933>

of dirt stuck in the fat rolls of her neck.”²⁶⁷ Mama June indulges in food, and she seemingly does not care. *White trash* culture threatens to publicly defy status symbols, and do so excessively.

Case Study: Gugliotta

"This [preventative care services] could help bridge the cultural gaps between doctors, many of whom are outsiders, and the Appalachian people they serve.”²⁶⁸
-Guy Gugliotta, 1993

The distinction between the productive, hardworking *elite* and the excessive, unproductive *white trash* can be seen in Guy Gugliotta’s 1993 *Washington Post* article. His article discusses the war on poverty and highlights the impoverished conditions of Appalachian Kentucky. He explains that “the real problem is poverty” and that society has not “figured out how to threat that.”²⁶⁹ Gugliotta suggests the issue is impoverished *people* and society has not figured out how to *fix them*.

Gugliotta runs into the issue of trying to be an advocate for anti-poverty, yet still explaining the impact of poverty on productivity. For instance, he explains, "poor people sit at home and worry...about getting enough to eat." However, he also states, "poor people eat too much." It is clear, then, that Gugliotta's concern is not food, as these two statements are conflicting, but rather the behaviors: sitting at home and eating too much. Gugliotta creates the same two perspectives that are prevalent in *white trash* discourse: the pathetic poor people who “sit at home and worry” about

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Gugliotta, G. “War on Poverty: Three Decades And No Victory: In the Hollows of Appalachia, Jobs are Still in Full Retreat.” *The Washington Post*. 1993.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., A27. The rest of this section is citing Gugliotta’s quotes from this same page.

eating and the defiant, overindulgent poor people who “eat too much.” Yet, Gugliotta makes no error in distinguishing the mainstream, productive doctor as the antithesis to the poor Appalachian. Poor people who simultaneously “sit at home and worry” about “getting enough to eat” and “eat too much” are the epitome of the excessive, both in time and consumption.

The problem is not that poor people have too much food, but that they eat it. In fact, having enough food to not worry about one’s next meal is a cultural achievement. However, mainstream whiteness has to be achieved, and part of this achievement is self-restraint. One should be able to have plenty of food, but know better than to eat it all. For instance, look at the *elite* issues about Honey Boo Boo.

It is this lack of discipline that then further disrupts productivity, as the *white trash* people need to be taken care of. Gugliotta attempts to portray this as a health concern by using a doctor as his example. However, doctor is as a proxy for *elite* culture, and it is clear that Gugliotta is targeting *white trash*’s culture in relation to productivity. He explains that their overindulgence and lack of restraint results in Diabetes.

Gugliotta creates two distinct characters: the doctor, the outsider and the provider, and the patient, the poor white Appalachian that is served and provided for. Not only does this excessive consumption lead to health concerns, but the poor Appalachians also cannot afford to pay the doctor for his services. The poor Appalachians are so far removed from the *elite* status of a doctor that Gugliotta calls for aid in “bridging the cultural gap between doctors, many of whom are outsiders, and the Appalachian people they serve.” The doctor is so “overworked and

unfamiliar” that he resorts to “shoot[ing] them [the poor/patient] up [with drugs].” Gugliotta is clearly distinguishing between the morally good, the doctor that is overworked and overburdened with trying to help an outside community, and the immoral, the *white trash* that just sits around and worries and cannot pay doctor bills. Furthermore, when the doctors aid the *white trash* with medicine, the patients overindulge in that too, as “prescription tranquilizers are the crack cocaine of the mountains,” and “binge drinking” further worsens this.

Gugliotta frames his discussion as if he is in defense of the poor Appalachians, who are victims of the “poverty’s trailer,” which he defines as “catastrophes that accompany poverty.” But the catastrophes that he speaks of are overindulgence and lack of productivity, arguably not catastrophes at all. Gugliotta’s approach and the approaches of his peers become increasingly complex as *white trash* culture allegedly displays a lack of self-discipline. In an effort to sympathize and pity *white trash* people, writers ultimately disregard the plausibility of a culture that is defiant and *backwards*, that is increasingly excessive as a form of resistance.

This issue of excess also relates to time, as Gugliotta highlights. Not only do poor people “sit at home and worry,” they also have so much leisure time that they “get bored, start drinking, and drive off a cliff.” They are so bored that they “move in with their families, argue and abuse each other.” Again, Gugliotta is emphasizing that the poor Appalachians should be pitied and are just desperate and backwards as a result of some great social factor. They are so bored that they just don’t know what to do with themselves and ultimately cause themselves harm. Gugliotta is framing his

passion for productivity as a means to save the *white trash*, as if productivity is necessary to save their lives.

Gugliotta's distinctions between the hardworking, yet overburdened doctor and the unproductive, excessive *white trash* are a representation of productivity as a mainstream value. The irony is, however, that the doctor is overburdened because of his hard work, which is due to his dependence on status in a social hierarchy created and maintained by the *elite*. They are the founders of their own burdens. *Elites* create and maintain social expectations that they must then conform to and they hate it. As a result, the greatest concern is that *white trash* ignores these social expectations and ultimately profit from the hard work that the *elite*/doctor has to put in, which makes the *elite* look absolutely foolish.

Chapter 7

Cleanliness

“(Avery was) such a dirty man that every time he would come to the jail the sheriff deputies would have to make Avery take a shower”²⁷⁰

-Deputy Judy Dvorak

The aforementioned quote is the description that Deputy Judy Dvorak gave of Steven Avery when she first suggested that he had raped Penny Bernstein. After hearing the victim’s account of the rape, Dvorak immediately suspected Steven Avery, and the depiction of Avery as a “dirty man” is used to depict him as *white trash*. Morality and cleanliness are perceived to be similar in American culture, and the dirty are seen to be the most immoral.²⁷¹ Thus, Dvorak’s comment was able to depict Avery as both physically and internally “dirty.” This account alone was strong enough to justify pursuing Avery as a suspect, and this subtle comment about Avery’s dirtiness ultimately led to Avery being falsely convicted of the rape of Penny Bernstein and being forced to spend eighteen years in prison.²⁷²

Furthermore, the portrayal of Avery as dirty has dominated discussions in popular media of *Making a Murderer*. One of the most popular topics was the fact that Steven Avery does not own underwear. For example, *US Magazine* released an article on January 13, 2016, titled *Making a Murderer's 10 Biggest WTF Moments: Steven Avery Doesn't Own Underwear and More! An innocent man spends 18 years in prison for a rape that he did not commit, yet the biggest WTF moment is*

²⁷⁰ This quote can be found in the documentary *Making A Murderer* episode 2 minute 13.

²⁷¹ Zhong, C., & Liljenquist, K. 2006. Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing. *Science*, 313(5792), 1451-1452.

²⁷² The discussion of Avery’s trial and the facts provided in this paragraph can be found in the documentary, *Making a Murderer*.

apparently that he doesn't wear underwear. America is fascinated with cleanliness and those that deviate from this value are perceived as monsters.

Cleanliness as an American Value

After the American Civil War, the United States went to great measures to ensure that the Southern states were educated on the importance of cleanliness so that they could assimilate into the *elite* American culture of the North. This led to the introduction of the Sanitary Commission, which was used by the Union to defeat the South, but this time in a cultural war. Utilizing the same structure that allowed the Union to physically defeat the Confederates in the Civil War, the Sanitary Commission's goal was to ensure that the Southerners would now adapt to a core American value. However, it was not until after World War II, when the economy boomed, that cleanliness reached its peak.²⁷³

The Rise of the *Hillbilly*

The cleanliness peak that was reached after World War II happened at the same time as the large migration of Appalachians to urban cities in pursuit of jobs. As a result, there was a clear contrast between those that endorsed the importance of cleanliness and those that did not, and low-status whites that rejected the importance of cleanliness were called *hillbilly*.²⁷⁴ Norma Lee Browning followed the *hillbillies* for an extended period of time and documented her findings in the Chicago Tribune in 1957. She documented that "investigators" called them "the most depraved of any

²⁷³ Hoy 1996

²⁷⁴ Norma Lee Browning is believed to be the first person to introduce the term *hillbilly*. The term served the same role as the term *white trash*.

they have ever encountered, with no understanding of sanitation or health.”²⁷⁵

Browning’s connection between “depraved” and “no understanding of sanitation” reflects the concerns regarding cleanliness. The dirtiness of *hillbillies* did not just represent lack of cleanliness but was also perceived to be a representation of their soul: they were evil. She then explains that the *hillbillies* could spot outsiders if they had “bathed recently and have [had] your [their] hair combed,” and that they would say, “hey, we don’t like the looks of you.”²⁷⁶ Browning’s concern was that the *hillbilly* might rise and do to the *elite* exactly what she does to the *hillbilly*: call them out for their cleanliness status. She was concerned that a group of people that rejects cleanliness has the potential to discriminate against people that endorse cleanliness, in which the current dominant group becomes the subordinate.

Thus, as perceptions of cleanliness moved further from defeating disease²⁷⁷ and more towards taming behavior, *hillbillies* were treated as the new cholera. Cholera was a disease that was highly contagious and led to diarrhea. *Hillbillies* were equally contagious, threatening to pass along their alleged non-clean behavior. While cholera was commonly viewed as the “scourge of the sinful,” *hillbillies* similarly served a role as the “sinful.”²⁷⁸ *Elite* culture viewed the lack of cleanliness in *white trash* culture to transcend any physical boundaries, and making even their soul “unclean.”

Thus, it became normalized to reinforce cleanliness in a panic around “health.” This was demonstrated through the hookworm crusade of the early

²⁷⁵ Browning, N. “Girl Reporter Visits Jungles of Hillbillies. *Chicago Sunday Tribune*. 1957

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Cleanliness was largely associated with fighting disease during the Civil War.

²⁷⁸ Hoy 1996

twentieth century as well as the dehumanization of the *hillbilly*. However, this tactic is hardly outdated, as a similar approach is utilized in the moral panic around meth, which is often perceived as a health concern, but is just another way that *elites* reinforce the importance of cleanliness.

Meth as Dirty

As previously mentioned, meth is primarily seen as a *white trash* drug. However, the anxieties concerning meth typically are not about the actual meth, but rather around behaviors associated with *white trash* meth use. Analysis of the discussions about meth, in relation to *white trash*, demonstrates that many of the ‘meth anxieties’ are actually just concerns surrounding the cleanliness of *white trash*. As a result, the war on meth relies on cleanliness as another way of distinguishing *white trash* meth users from “good, clean” Americans.

For instance, Michael Ko wrote about the “toll” that meth plays on children of methamphetamine abusers.²⁷⁹ In this Seattle Times article, Ko highlights that meth leads children to be more likely to be “sexually abused and violent and to have more lice and rotten teeth.”²⁸⁰ Ko’s use of “lice and rotten teeth” in conjunction with “sexually abused and violent” suggests that these issues are of similar value. However, the only issue that Ko delves deeper into is the concern around the lack of cleanliness, demonstrating Ko’s real concerns.

"When they come into care," Anderson says, "they have caked-on dirt. Rubbing them down at the hospital doesn't get them clean. With other kinds of

²⁷⁹ Ko, M. “Cruellest meth-lab toll: kids.” *Seattle Times*. September 19, 2001.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

drug use, you see some level of parenting. With meth, parents aren't able to do that."²⁸¹

Ko explains that the children have "caked-on dirt," but Ko is not worried about the dirt. Dirt is easy to clean; a simple wipe down from the nurse can fix that. However, a nurse cannot simply wipe away a culture of uncleanness. Ko does not perceive the sole role of a parent to clean one's child, but Ko is highlighting the role that parents have in passing along culture, and to pass along a culture of uncleanness is a disgrace to American values. In an article about methamphetamine, a drug associated with addiction, violence, and death, Ko feels the need to highlight the lack of cleanliness, and this is reflective of the role of cleanliness in creating the "other," the non-clean, the *white trash*. Yolanda Duralde, a physician at a Children's Hospital, reinforces this idea:

"When you hear meth lab, you have to eliminate this idea of a neat lab setting with beakers and tubes going everywhere."²⁸²

Duralde is not concerned about meth. The contrast of the neat meth lab from the dirt-filled meth lab has one thing in common: meth. Yet, one is still better than the other, reflecting a cultural value of cleanliness. The 'toxic contamination' that Duralde refers to is nothing more than a metaphor for the role of methamphetamine in American society. It is fine if it is controlled, just as is culture, but cleanliness is not. It is passed along to the children, which is a threat to American values that allow the maintenance *elite's* perceived dominant position. Cleanliness is nothing more than a means to distinguish between groups, and the war on meth is reflective of that.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² In Ibid.

Another method for analyzing the role of cleanliness in the war on meth is analyzing the differing responses to meth depending on the user. For instance, the aforementioned quotes are associated with meth and *white trash*. However, popular media often highlights meth abuse from *non-white trash* individuals. One such example is the hit television show, *Breaking Bad*. The main character is a chemistry teacher who keeps an incredibly clean lab. There is no moral panic around *Breaking Bad*, because the meth user is not *white trash*. Instead, the meth user is a middle class white man, so the show receives positive reviews.

There is an episode of *Breaking Bad*, however, that introduces a *white trash* couple. They are identified as *white trash* by their trailer home, dirty appearance, and behavior, and unsurprisingly, they are portrayed as the antagonists. They clearly do not work and are attempting to make money by stealing ATMs, but they fail to actually break open the ATM. This brings about the concerns regarding cleanliness and work ethic. In the end, one of the *white trash* characters is killed and his death is largely ignored.²⁸³ Thus, the distinction between the *elite*, middle class meth user that serves as the show's protagonist and the *white trash* that ultimately dies is clear; the *elite* are again favorable, despite the drug (meth) being the same.

Another example of the different responses to meth users based on their social status is reflected in a 2005 article featured in the Chicago Daily Herald.

"Meth has these different faces. Downstate, you have lower- income people living in trailers and making meth to feed their addictions," says Steve Mange, who heads up the state attorney general's anti-meth efforts. "In Chicago, it is the gays and lesbians, and those are often middle- to upper-class

²⁸³ In *Breaking Bad*, season 2, episode 6: *Peekaboo*.

professionals.” And then there are exhausted suburban women who are looking for something -anything - to help them balance their busy lives.”²⁸⁴

In what may initially come off as a sentimental argument that meth can impact anyone, Steve Mange clearly describes the differences in concerns regarding meth usage dependent on the user. For instance, Mange specifically classifies a group as “gays and lesbians,” that often times are “middle- to upper-class professionals,” and not middle- to upper-class professionals that are often gay and lesbian. By doing this, Mange is highlighting that the concern is sex, as their subordinate status is dependent on the perpetuation of social norms around sexuality, and the sexual liberation that can result from methamphetamine is a threat to the *mainstream*. This can also be seen later as Mange discusses a gay man specifically and the threat of conceiving HIV and other STDs, which one can assume Mange is suggesting is a result from sexual intercourse.

On the other hand, the upper-class women are framed as “exhausted” and just searching for energy, presumably because of the “hard-work” that they’ve put into their careers. Interestingly, there are no explicit behaviors that are discussed in relation to the upper-class status. In fact, Mange only highlights what meth could lead to: “broke and jobless, estranged from family and friends.” However, as long as meth doesn’t lead to that, Mange seems to believe that there is nothing wrong with meth usage by middle class suburban women. The same cannot be said for gays, however, as their associated behavior is sex, which is a threat to *mainstream* values.

²⁸⁴ O’Konowitz, T. “Rising meth toll As crystal meth tightens its grip in the Chicago area, a suburban native considers himself lucky to have survived his addiction.” *Daily Herald*. August 9, 2005.

The construction of *white trash* as unclean and the anxieties concerning the lack of cleanliness are prevalent in this article, yet coded as “trailer-park.” Because *white trash* is only mentioned in passing in this article, Mange doesn’t adequately describe the anxieties concerning *white trash* meth usage, but in the two occurrences in which *white trash* individuals are present, Mange uses the term, “trailers:” “They don't fit the profile of poor white women in trailer parks - these are prosperous, upper-class women,” he says. “They are professionals living in big fancy houses and driving Beemers.” Here, the author doesn’t distinguish by meth usage, and instead he highlights housing status of users. If meth were the issue, then this distinction would be unnecessary.

Oral Hygiene



Example of *Meth Mouth*²⁸⁵

Meth use evokes an image of ruined teeth in association with white trash, which is prevalent in anti-meth campaigns. For instance, Travis Linnemann discusses the role of teeth in mugshot images used by Brian King, a deputy well known for his anti-meth campaigns. Linneman explains, using quotations from the *Faces of Meth*

²⁸⁵ Image retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/meth-mouth-inside-look-at-icky-problem-15-graphic-images/>

campaign, that high school students document their own experiences with the anti-meth campaign and find these images even more influential than their experiences with friends and family using meth.²⁸⁶ This is crucial in understanding the anxieties concerning meth, as these images are more powerful than real-life experiences around addiction and death.

The war on dirty teeth is literal whitewashing; there is a cultural emphasis on washing one's teeth until they are white, with an entire market for products that highlight whitening teeth, despite the actual health benefits. Just as *white trash* are somehow *not quite white* in culture, they also fail to clean themselves to achieve physical whiteness. They are unwilling to cover their vices as their meth use cannot be covered or will not be covered up. The discourse of meth teeth highlights the fear of the addict in being complacent with decaying teeth.

Methamphetamine depletes calcium stores in the body, causing the body to take what it needs from bones and teeth. Add to that the fact that meth addicts neglect oral hygiene and dental care, and you see why many meth addicts have gray or decaying teeth.

-TN Meth and Pharmaceutical Task Force²⁸⁷

Here, the TN Meth and Pharmaceutical Task Force highlights *white trash's* unwillingness to clean their teeth. The impact of meth use on teeth is the same for individuals from various backgrounds. However, the personal role in addressing the appearance in one's teeth is a marker for different social classes, and not cleaning meth teeth is a *white trash* act. Thus, the prioritization of teeth in meth awareness

²⁸⁶ Linnemann, T. and T. Wall. 2013. "This Is Your Face on Meth': The Punitive Spectacle of 'White Trash' in the Rural War on Drugs." *Theoretical Criminology* 17(3), 320.

²⁸⁷ This can be seen on *TN Meth and Pharmaceutical Task Force's* website, under FAQ answering the question, "Why does meth change people's appearance?" Retrieved from <http://www.rid-meth.org/faq.html>

both vilifies and directs attention to *white trash*, not for their use of meth, but for their lack of participation in *elite* culture that values cleanliness.

The demonization of *white trash* meth users is prevalent in multiple forms of *meth* discourse. For instance, the following is the mission statement of TN Meth and Pharmaceutical Task Force:

The Mission of the Tennessee Methamphetamine and Pharmaceutical Task Force is to reduce the availability and use of methamphetamine and to prevent the illegal distribution, abuse or unintended use of prescription drugs in Tennessee by educating the public about the dangers of these drugs; by providing equipment, training and investigative tools to assist law enforcement authorities in strategically identifying, targeting and prosecuting these drug offenders; by networking with regulatory agencies and healthcare providers; and by protecting the public from the harmful effects of the manufacture and illegal use of these drugs.²⁸⁸

The entire mission statement is devoted to the pursuit and criminalization of the drug abuse. Nowhere in the statement is the effort of the task force stated to be on treatment of addiction or child welfare. In fact, the statement finishes with "protecting the public from the harmful effects of the manufacture and illegal use of these drugs." Obviously, the point of the final sentence is to paint meth as a threat to the community, but what is the threat exactly? As previously highlighted, meth is seen as an "antisocial" and "dirty" drug. So what are the concerns? Seeing your neighbors defy cultural values such as having clean teeth. The navigation tools on the TN Meth and Pharmaceutical Task Force Website reinforce the idea that meth is dirty. The sidebars direct web viewers to various tools for catching meth users, reporting them, history of meth lab locations, and other tools used to vilify meth users. Finally, one finds an interesting sidebar: quarantine cleanup contractors, which obviously leads viewers to a list of quarantine cleanup contractors in TN. However, why would the

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

public need this information if they were to report the crimes to the police? The answer is that they would not. The link is only there as a tool for reminding visitors that methamphetamine is dirty. Meth is so dirty that the community will literally need a quarantine *clean up* contractor.

Furthermore, one of the "*frequently asked questions*" on the TN Meth and Pharmaceutical Task Force's website is "how could they let this happen," referring to the appearance of the meth abuser, to which the task force responds, "they aren't aware of the changes in themselves, their need for the drug overrides and thoughts of personal grooming or hygiene." It is interesting enough that the *this* (in how could they let this happen) refers to, yet again, appearance. However, more interesting is the response: changes *in themselves*. The task force does not refer to changes in their *appearance*, rather in *themselves*, hinting that this is a moral issue. This is more than just an issue of outwardly appearance.

White Trash Teeth in Television

The use of teeth as a social marker goes beyond meth discourse. It is one of the most frequently used symbols for *white trash* in television, as can be seen in hit television shows and movies such as *Breaking Bad*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *Deliverance*. In *Breaking Bad*, a police officer attempts to persuade the main protagonist's son, Flynn, to never smoke weed again. The cop shows Flynn what he could become if he became addicted to drugs by showing Flynn the teeth of a white prostitute who uses meth. The cop identifies the prostitute as a meth user by saying,

“show us your teeth.”²⁸⁹ The goal of this scene was clearly to depict *white trash* as the “what not to be,” playing into the concerns of the *elite*: their children run the risk of becoming the lowest of the social ladder, the dirty *white trash*. Similarly, in the film *Deliverance*, one of the *white trash* characters shows his lack of teeth while he is raping another character. Again, the role of this teeth flash in this scene is to give yet another marker of *white trash*. It serves as a reminder that deviation from mainstream values, in this case cleanliness, is the act of a rapist, a criminal, a savage.

Furthermore, a case study on the characterization of Pennsatucky in the *Orange is the New Black* captures the relationship between *white trash* and teeth. Pennsatucky is introduced into the show as aggressive and hard to get along with, as she is deemed the show’s main antagonist and villain.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, Pennsatucky is clearly a representation of *white trash* as she is a poor, white woman whose teeth are dirty and damaged from her prior meth use. However, as the show progresses, Pennsatucky’s storyline changes and more is revealed about her character, leading viewers to perceive Pennsatucky as more favorable and “multifaceted.”²⁹¹ This occurs after much is revealed about Pennsatucky’s past. At the same time as the writers of the show began to “humanize” Pennsatucky through giving more of her backstory, they also allowed the character to get new teeth, leading to a physical transition from

²⁸⁹ This quote can be found in *Breaking Bad*, Season 1, Episode 3: *...and the Bag’s in the River*.

²⁹⁰ Semigran, A. 2015. “How Pennsatucky Went From Villain to Fan Favorite on *Orange Is The New Black*.” *TV Insider*. July 15, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.tvinsider.com/article/27928/how-pennsatucky-went-from-villain-to-fan-favorite-on-orange-is-the-new-black/>

²⁹¹ Bernstein, A. “Pennsatucky’s redemption: How ‘Orange Is the New Black’ pulled a reverse ‘Breaking Bad.’” June 20, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2015/06/20/pennsatuckys_redemption_how_orange_is_the_new_black_pulled_a_reverse_breaking_bad/

the villain *white trash* to the more favorable, mainstream Pennsatucky.²⁹² Jen Trolio of Vox explains that Pennsatucky “was once a toothless, close-minded, Bible-thumper,” but now that “the season three arc has humanized her so much it feels too mean to keep calling her Pennsatucky.”²⁹³ Thus, the “toothless” and “pennsatucky” attributes of Pennsatucky are reflections of the dehumanized, the *white trash*, the nonhuman. On the other hand, now that Pennsatucky is “humanized,” she is free of her nickname and, as the show depicts, her dirty teeth. Dirty teeth are just one way in which lack of cleanliness appears in *white trash* discourse. This American fascination with cleanliness aids in the portrayal of *white trash* as monsters and is often used to elicit negative emotions from viewers and the general public, as can be seen in the characterization of Pennsatucky as well as the real world perceptions of Steven Avery.

²⁹² Trolio, J. “Orange Is the New Black has finally humanized Pennsatucky. It is about time.” *Vox Culture*. July 1, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.vox.com/2015/7/1/8873101/orange-is-the-new-black-pennsatucky-doggett>

²⁹³ Ibid.

Conclusion
Abolishing the Sin.

"It would've been a whole lot easier to eliminate Steve than it would be to frame Steve."

-Sherriff Ken Peterson²⁹⁴

In *Making a Murderer*, Sherriff Ken Peterson states that it would be easier to kill Steven Avery than to frame him, and this mentality seems all too familiar to the Eugenics movement. While Avery was not murdered, he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. However, many *white trash* men have received much harsher sentences. For instance, Damien Echols, of West Memphis 3, was wrongfully sentenced to death and would have died if new evidence did not prove his innocence in 2011. Similarly, Cameron Todd Willingham was deemed *white trash* throughout the media portrayal of his case and he was sentenced to death, but new evidence discredits all of the evidence that suggested his guilt. Even after confronted with this evidence, the prosecutor did not feel bad about sentencing Willingham to death, as he says, "not a man like Todd," because Todd was "a man from the wrong side of the tracks."²⁹⁵ Willingham was *white trash* and the prosecutor felt that as such, he deserved death.

These cases fall in line with how *white trash* has been treated in media and literature for years. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Bob Ewell, the main antagonist, was murdered, but his murder was covered up as a suicide. The other characters just acted as if Ewell fell drunkenly on his knife, something that a "drunken *white trash* lout

²⁹⁴ In *Making A Murderer*, episode 4

²⁹⁵ Quote featured in an episode of *Nightline*: "The Wrongful Execution of Cameron Todd Willingham."

might plausibly do."²⁹⁶ This suicide was believed largely because Ewell was *white trash* and presumably, no one cared. Similarly, in *Breaking Bad*, there was the appearance of a *white trash* couple and the episode ultimately ended in the death of the *white trash* man. Just like in *TKAM*, the death received little attention and was not even discussed. *White trash* death is perceived as meaningless, just the new form of the Eugenics movement from a century prior.

White trash is nothing more than a manifestation of the behaviors that white elites despise. *White trash* is the personification of white guilty pleasures. The *reformed sinner* needs to project his sin onto another to acknowledge the difference between his past and his present, his guilty and his reformed. What more could one want than to kill and destroy the guilty pleasures that haunt him every day, to rid himself of any guilty desire. This is exactly what happens to *white trash*, both metaphorically and physically.

²⁹⁶ Lind, M. "White Trash Gothic." *The Smart Set*. February 16, 2015. Retrieved from <http://thesmartset.com/article02161501/>

Works Cited

- Anderson, Elijah. 1999. *Code Of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Armstrong, Edward G. 2007. "Moral Panic Over Meth." *Contemporary Justice Review* 10(4):427-42.
- Bagwell, L. and Bernheim, B. 1996 "Veblen Effects in a Theory of Conspicuous Consumption." *The American Economic Review* 86(3): 349-373.
- Bernstein, Matthew. 2010. *Michael Moore: Filmmaker, Newsmaker, Cultural Icon*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Calarco, J. M. 2014. "Coached For the Classroom: Parents' Cultural Transmission and Children's Reproduction of Educational Inequalities." *American Sociological Review* 79(5):1015-37.
- Chen, L, Eric C. Strain, Pierre Kebreau Alexandre, Caleb Alexander, Ramin Moitahai, and Silvia Martins. 2014. "Correlates of nonmedical use of stimulants and methamphetamine use in a national sample." *Addictive Behaviors* 39(5): 829-836.
- Cohen, Stanley. 1980. *Folk Devils and Moral Panic: the Creation of the Mods and Rockers*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Coleman, James S. 1988. "Social Capital In the Creation of Human Capital." *American Journal of Sociology* 94.
- Dines, Gail and Jean McMahon Humez. 1995. *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: a Text-Reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Goode, E. 1994. "Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, And Social Construction." *Annual Review of Sociology* 20(1): 149-71.
- Fomby, P. and A. J. Cherlin. 2007. "Family Instability And Child Well-Being." *American Sociological Review* 72(2):181-204.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. 1997. *Scenes Of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hazen, K. and Hamilton, S. 2008. "A Dialect Turned Inside Out: Migration And the Appalachian Diaspora." *Journal of English Linguistics* 36(2):105-28.
- Hoy, Suellen. 1995. *Chasing Dirt: the American Pursuit of Cleanliness*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Jenkins, Virginia Scott. 1994. *The Lawn: a History of an American Obsession*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kahlenberg, R. 2006. "The New Integration." *Educational Leadership*.
- Lareau, Annette. 2000. *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education*: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*: Univ of California Press.
- Lee, H. (1960). *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Linnemann, T. and T. Wall. 2013. "This Is Your Face on Meth!: The Punitive Spectacle of 'White Trash' in the Rural War on Drugs." *Theoretical Criminology* 17(3):315–34.
- Loughnan, Steve, Nick Haslam, Robbie M. Sutton, and Bettina Spencer. 2014. "Dehumanization And Social Class." *Social Psychology* 45(1):54–61.
- McCarter, William Matthew. 2012. *Homo Redneckus: on Being Not Qwhite in America*. New York: Algora Pub.
- Moss, Kirby. 2003. *The Color of Class: Poor Whites and the Paradox of Privilege*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Murray, Charles A. 2012. *Coming Apart: the State of White America, 1960-2010*. New York, NY: Crown Forum.
- Neace, Donald. 2012. "Accent Effects on Recall: Southern Appalachian Accent versus Television National News Anchor Accent." Master thesis, Southern Connecticut State University.
- Newman, Katherine. 1999. *No Shame in My Game: the Working Poor in the Inner City*. New York: Knopf and the Russell Sage Foundation.
- Newman, Katherine. 2002. "No Shame: The View From the Left Bank1." *American Journal of Sociology* 107(6):1577–99.
- Obermiller, Phillip, Chad Berry, Roger Guy, J. Trent Alexander, William Philliber, Michael Maloney, and Bruce Tucker. "Major Turning Points: Rethinking Appalachian Migration." *Appalachian Journal* 36(3): 164-187.

- Ramsey, William. (2012). *Abomination: Devil Worship and Deception in the West Memphis Three Murders*. Lexington, KY: William Ramsey.
- Roediger, David R. 1994. *Towards The Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History*. London: Verso.
- Sullivan, Andrew. 1995. *Virtually Normal: an Argument about Homosexuality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Thompson, Neal. 2006. *Driving With the Devil: Southern Moonshine, Detroit Wheels, and the Birth of NASCAR*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Welter, Barbara. 1966. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18(2): 151-174.
- Whitney, Kristoffer. 2010. "Living Lawns, Dying Waters: The Suburban Boom, Nitrogenous Fertilizers, And the Nonpoint Source Pollution Dilemma." *Technology and Culture* 51(3):652-74.
- Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Knopf.
- Wray, Matt. 2006. *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wray, Matt and Annalee Newitz. 1997. *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge.
- Zhong, C., & Liljenquist, K. 2006. Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing. *Science*, 313(5792), 1451-1452.