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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Camoface: Performances of Ruralism in *Duck Dynasty***Jason Jordan**

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Abstract

In recent years, portrayals of the supposedly “real” exploits of rural persons in the United States have proliferated across the mediasphere. This paper examines the first season of the television show *Duck Dynasty* as an exemplar of this genre of entertainment. Using the concepts of ruralism, rurality, and rusticity the particular performances of rural life evidenced within the show are traced out. Ultimately, I argue that these performances of the rural constitute a strategic rhetoric that seeks to control what counts as authentic rurality. I term these sorts of strategic performances of rural authenticity as “camoface.”

Introduction

Phil Robertson caused a public controversy over free speech, religious liberty, and political correctness in January of 2014 with his negative characterizations of gay men and African-Americans in an interview with *GQ*. This incident sparked both calls for his firing from the television show *Duck Dynasty* as well as efforts to support Phil and the rest of the Robertson family that makes up the show’s cast (France, 2014). However, *Duck Dynasty* became more than a mere reality television show. The show, and the Robertson family, directly influenced political elections (FoxNews.com, 2013), spurred changes in liturgical practice (WTAE, 2013), sat in on the state of the union address (Weinger, 2014), were portrayed as exemplars of traditional American culture (Royer, 2013), and sparked changes in popular fashion (O’Connor, 2013).

Duck Dynasty is one of several television shows that garnered a high level of popularity due to their portrayal of “family values” and “real America” (Falzone, 2013). However, these portrayals also constitute the reification of problematic assumptions about rural populations that serve to further a cultural hierarchy that denigrates the rural. Through an analysis of manifestations of both tactical and strategic articulations of authentic rural identity in the first season of *Duck Dynasty* this article introduces the concept of *camoface*: the performance of rural identity in a manner that reifies pejorative assumptions pertaining to rural populations while at the same time controlling social understandings of such identities so that rural persons are unable to assert contrary meanings of their own social locations.

Duck Dynasty

Duck Dynasty purports to follow the real, day-to-day lives of the Robertson family in rural Louisiana. The family lives in opulent wealth due to the success of a brand of duck calls their Duck Commander hunting company has produced over the last 25 years (Owens & Scholz, 2012). However, as Romano (2012, para. 4) explained:

Though the bearded, backwoods-appearing Robertson clan is richer than dirt, they don't look or act like it. They live in a modest, if cramped-looking, house, go to work every day, and don't have beards thicker than the forests surrounding their homes.

The narrative action of the show is driven by the founder of Duck Commander, Phil Robertson and his sons Jase and Willie. While several female characters are often shown on screen, by and large their roles are reduced to supporting narrative transition, or playing an antagonistic role against the desires of the male Robertsons.

Duck Dynasty is far from a singular phenomenon. Instead, the show can be seen as indicative of a new manifestation of rural characterization that proliferated in recent years across the U.S. mediasphere (Obeidallah, 2013). While there are many examples of this genre of reality television (e.g., *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, *Buck Wild*, and *Swamp People*), *Duck Dynasty* is the quintessential exemplar both in terms of cultural influence and television ratings (James, 2013). Thus, while sharing some similarities with other contemporaneous programs, *Duck Dynasty* stands out setting records as “the most-watched non-fiction cable-television series in history” with “9.4 million viewers” (Clay County Times-Democrat, 2014).

While *Duck Dynasty* presents a version of rural life, it is ultimately at odds with many of the experiences of individuals residing in rural locations within the United States. These communities experience some of the highest rates of economic poverty in the U.S. (USDA, 2013), suffer from a systemic lack of access to medical and mental health professionals of all specializations (Bassett, 2003a; Meit et al. 2014), and have been described as some of the most pernicious food deserts in America (Canto et al., 2014). Indeed, living in a rural area increases the likelihood of an individual dying from almost any preventable disease or medical condition and directly lowers one's life expectancy (Gamm et al., 2003).

These material conditions exist within a national culture that both denigrates rural individuals and denies the violence of rural poverty (Bassett, 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2011; Creed & Ching, 1997). While the construction and denigration of a rural other is certainly not a new phenomenon (Williams, 1975), contemporary representations of the rural in the United States are novel in both their form (reality television and social media) as well as their tendency to construct and police what constitutes *authentic* rural life. Thus, *Duck Dynasty's* presentation of ‘redneck’ culture is far from neutral or benign. Instead, a particular sort of rural personification is offered to audiences that in turn negates the actual, lived experiences of many rural dwellers in the United States.

Rural Authenticity

Within rural contexts competing articulations of authenticity of personal or group identity have often been used to further broader cultural or political agendas (Khan, 1997; King, 2014; Norton & Sadler, 2006; Woods et al., 2013). Thus, what ‘counts’ as authentically rural has historically been an ideological contest for a position of power, for example, southern whites seeking to marginalize African-American rural experiences throughout the history of the United States (Maxwell, 1997). Differences in interpretation of what constitutes an authentic rural identity (and which persons ought to be excluded from consideration as authentic) are often articulated via their performance. Thus, certain cultural practices such as clothing, food, and music could be interpreted as performative acts of marking oneself as authentic (Creed & Ching, 1997).

Most rhetorical studies of authenticity (Dickinson, 2002; Senda-Cook, 2012; Shugart, 2008) have tended to focus on authenticity as experiential. That is, these scholars have keyed upon the elements that constitute an authentic interaction with a particular locale or cultural phenomenon. Insofar as these studies interact with authentic identity it is in relation to identities built around being an individual that has had authentic experiences or knows how to perform an activity in an authentic manner. These examples of rhetorical authenticity can be considered *tactical authenticity*. Tactical actions are constrained by external power structures, and focus on specific events and uses/subversions of broader schemas placed on a field of action (de Certeau, 1984/1988). Tactical rhetorics of authenticity are oriented toward specific, present exigencies with the assumed goal of allowing the rhetor to productively navigate within the demarcated cultural terrain their performed identity is placed within. Thus, both Dickinson's (2002) study of the role of authenticity in the ritual of ordering coffee and Senda-Cook's (2012) analysis of outdoor recreation point to rhetorical authenticity as a tactic, a set of potential actions and practices that might be taken for a rhetor to gain the cultural or social capital of having authentically experienced a phenomenon. In both cases authenticity is both sought and deployed by particular consumers and participants *within* a socially defined and limited context. These are rhetorical acts in which individuals seek an event engagement granting them access to authenticity. Simply, tactical authenticity refers to the rhetorical practices that individuals may engage in to *acquire* an identity or strengthen their cultural bona fides.

However, performances of cultural identity might also evidence *strategic* authenticity, a social strategy that "postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats" might be rhetorically "managed" (de Certeau, 1984/1988, p. 36). Strategic rhetorics of authenticity imply bordering claims beyond the present exigency, policing the performative and rhetorical terrain available for other rhetors that might seek a stake in authenticating their own experiences and self. Thus, as opposed to tactical authenticity which draws attention to the particular experience and act, rhetorics of strategic authenticity seek to delink a singular position from specific times and places in order to render the strategic terrain the point from which other specific conditions and identities might be measured (de Certeau, 1984/1988; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995).

Admittedly, many rhetorical performances of authenticity evidence both strategic and tactical dimensions. While a rhetor might be ensuring their own perceived authenticity in response to a given exigency, such a performance could reify, refract, or reject the broader borders of that given identity category. By analyzing the manifestations of these tropes within *Duck Dynasty*, the aim of this article is to contribute more acutely to the nature of rhetorics of authenticity that both seek authentication within a particular cultural system while also molding, policing, and regulating the content and borders of the rhetorical terrain with which they engage.

Ruralism, Rusticity, and Rurality

Previous disciplinary studies of rural individuals and communities have highlighted the contested and contestable nature of accepted limits of rural authenticity (King, 2014; Norton & Sadler, 2006; Woods et al., 2013), the conflation of southern ruralness with particular conceptualizations of economic class, time, and whiteness (Black & Harrison, 2015; Park, 2009; Stokes, 2005), as well as the mobilization of popular notions of rural and frontier history with Americanness in political and cultural discourse (Ewalt, 2011; West & Carey, 2006). One aim of this article is to add to these disciplinary studies of ruralness and rural authenticity the insights

offered by legal scholars and sociologists that have framed rural stereotypes and rural denigration as part and parcel of a broader cultural system of ruralism. Ruralism manifests in many ways and includes:

Discrimination on the basis of factors stemming from living in a rural area. As is true of many other forms of discrimination, ruralism entails the projection of stereotyped attributes by a more powerful majority group onto a less powerful minority group (Bassett, 2003a, p. 279).

Ruralist representations are produced and reified through a mass media that mocks rural speech patterns and insinuates that rural individuals are the product of inbreeding, lack basic knowledge of social cues, and are generally slow witted (Bassett, 2003a). Of note, ruralism ought not be considered merely a form of discrimination against ‘poor whites.’ Rural populations in the contemporary United States represent a rich plurality of racial, ethnic, occupational, and religious diversity unified by “themes of isolation, poverty, and lack of access to goods and services” (Bassett, 2003b, p. 746). The cultural system of ruralism becomes further complicated by the ways it intersects with, defies, and subsumes states of *rurality*.

Rurality refers to the actual, specific material qualities of living in a *particular* rural location (Creed & Ching, 1997). Rurality is often conflated with *rusticity*, the privations and material poverty associated with generally undeveloped, natural locales (Creed & Ching, 1997). In this way, “Notions of rusticity and rurality mediate each other” therefore “tensions between authenticity/rurality and backwardness/rusticity diffract uniform constructions” (Khan, 1997, p. 64). Thus, a conflation of qualities often distinct from merely dwelling in a rural locale have become in many cases *definitive* of its authenticity. The implication of this conflation is that the sometimes-present conditions of rusticity become primary to the actual material forms of rurality that are multifarious and diverse. In this way the cultural logic of ruralism marks the multiplicity of ruralities in the United States as first and foremost manifestations of rusticity, regardless of the actual material conditions of any specific rural locale. However, since “the rural/urban distinction underlies many of the power relations that shape the experiences of people in nearly every culture” so that “many cultural activities operate to keep people in their places” (Creed & Ching, 1997, p. 2) this conflation is not always projected *onto* rural persons, in many cases it is *enacted* by such individuals.

Performances of Ruralism in Duck Dynasty

The remainder this article offers a critical rhetorical reading of the first season of *Duck Dynasty* in an attempt to “seek to unmask or demystify the discourse of power” (McKerrow, 1989/1999, p. 441). The first season of the show lays out a general narrative script and set of tropes that the later seasons of the *Duck Dynasty* operate within with very little deviation (Guagenti, 2014).

My analysis is informed by an ideological critical commitment, seeking to interrogate the values and assumptions that are reified within the text by way of questioning who or what benefits from the text’s representation of reality (Wander, 1983), and comparing its notions of reality to actual material conditions (Triece, 2011).

To this end, I focus on the ways in which the show’s performances operate within while also defining, disciplining, and policing the boundaries of a supposedly singular, authentic identity of rural experience. These performances are of note because:

Today, fiction claims to make the real present, to speak in the name of the facts and thus to cause the semblance it produces to be taken as a referential reality. Hence those to whom these legends are directed (and who pay for them) are not obliged to believe what they don't see (a traditional position), but rather to believe what they see (a contemporary position) (de Certeau, 1984/1988, p. 187).

My ideological reading is grounded in a focus on the aforementioned tropes of rusticity, rurality, and ruralism. By highlighting the uses and silencing of these themes throughout the text the rhetorical performing and shaping of rural authenticity can be mapped out for critique. My goal is to home in on instances in which one of these tropes is brought to the fore or muted by the rhetorical action of *Duck Dynasty*, as well as moments when rusticity, rurality, and ruralism seem to intersect with and subsume one another. It is in these moments that the content and boundaries of an authentic rural identity are both tactically performed while they are also strategically molded and policed.

This mode of analysis will be used to map out the uses of authenticity as it applies to rural persons within the text seeking to answer the question: within the rhetoric of *Duck Dynasty*, what constitutes being authentically rural, and what behaviors or qualities put access to that authenticity into question? To answer this question I first discuss the presentation of qualities that are presumed to be intrinsically part of all "rednecks." Next, I trace out the particular sort of masculinity that *Duck Dynasty* holds up as an exemplar of rural values. Finally, I complicate this supposedly authentic, rural identity via other performances of rurality within the narrative periphery of the show.

"Redneck Logic"

Duck Dynasty presents a view of rural populations in which rednecks are happy to live in a state of constant material privation. This general preference for conditions of rusticity, and rejecting the urbane and the modern out of hand is termed "redneck logic" by the show's protagonists. As Phil Robertson explains, "in the South" because of the desire to adorn one's life with the markings of rusticity "everything is usable," thus, "one man's junk is another man's treasure." Of note, the series goes far beyond communicating that rural persons are able to merely *get by* in conditions of rusticity and social exclusion, instead, such populations are presented as *enjoying*, and in many instances preferring to have things of material value denied from them. So, it makes sense that the show introduces every episode as being premised upon the tension between the material wealth the Robertson family has amassed, and the fact that "the family just wants to run wild." A particularly salient example of this tension is demonstrated in the espoused culinary preferences of the show's cast. Early in the series, it is explained that true rural dwellers have a general disdain for store bought meat. Instead, for a true, authentic rural dweller there is "nothing sweeter" than frog caught in the ponds of a private golf course.

In addition to being portrayed as enjoying rusticity, *Duck Dynasty* also presents a very particular skill set as a defining quality of rural authenticity. Primary among this skill set is the ability to creatively make do with whatever materials are freely available. As Jase Robertson explains "You give a redneck metal, lumber, tape, and a few wrenches, we can build anything." This theme of "redneck ingenuity" is repeated throughout the series, with the primary cast of characters expressing disdain for any effort to follow the supposed rules of safe construction and building. Additionally, the skill set of the hunter is presented as a marker of authentic ruralness. As Phil Robertson explains, "My idea of happiness is killing things." While these general themes

might seem benign, the strategic role they play on the discursive borders of rural authenticity becomes evident when they are deployed upon characters within the show to exclude alternative performances of ruralness from the scope of authenticity.

The character of Willie Robertson becomes a frequent focus of efforts to demarcate what counts and what doesn't in the discourse of rural authenticity produced by the series. At length, Willie's family confides in the viewer that "Willie is in an identity crises," the nexus of which is the border between being a redneck and being a *real* redneck. Thus, when Willie displays fear toward a nest of snakes that are inadvertently discovered, other members of the Robertson family explain that such a reaction is indicative of "too many days in a subdivision." Additionally, Willie's frequent utilization of a cell phone (as CEO of the Duck Commander brand) is marked as indicative of a full loss of authenticity. Willie then, is framed as representing some small bit of the urbane that the rusticity espoused as indicative of authentic rurality must be guarded against.

Thus, the properly authentic rural persona is not only tactically performed through the actions of characters in *Duck Dynasty*, but very particular behaviors and intrinsic qualities are also strategically demarcated as impurities that pollute authentic rurality. Generally, the authentically rural person in *Duck Dynasty* enjoys and prefers conditions of rusticity, possesses a rugged, masculine individualist skill set that allows them to thrive in such conditions, and guards themselves against all possible intrusions of the urbane into their personal subjectivity.

"No Nerds"

Phil Robertson explains his general mantra for appropriate displays of rural masculinity as simply: "No Nerds." Instead, as Jase Robertson explains "redneck law" mandates that you must "carry a shotgun everywhere" and "shoot it often," therefore "Bring home game or you're not a man." Thus, the performances of authenticity within the show can be read as privileging a form of masculinity that eschews education and prefers hyper-masculinity (performed through acts of violence) as a means to produce material results. Additionally, the form of masculinity ascribed to rural persons in *Duck Dynasty* indicates that "Real men don't call plumbers." This is a theme that permeates through almost every episode of the first season of the show. When problems arise, it is not merely that the Robertson's *want* to fix things themselves (which in many cases they might) but instead, that authenticity is lost when conditions of hardship are remedied via access to economic means. This is repeatedly displayed by the Robertson's destructive and ultimately abortive attempts to build conveyor belts, construct a wine press, remodel the Duck Commander headquarters, and remove dilapidated duck blinds. Throughout the show, problems are dealt with through a form of masculine, rugged ingenuity that eschews professional assistance en lieu of (literal) explosions, larger hammers, and attempted feats of strength. These choices are not presented as a matter of pride but are rhetorically couched throughout the show as the behavior needed to prove the redneck bona fides of the protagonists. The authentically rural man presented on these terms is quick to aggression, refuses formal education, and does not utilize basic services when in need.

However, this particular form of masculinity is also constantly under attack in the world of *Duck Dynasty*. The men of the show variously compare their female counterparts to Labrador retrievers, ducks, or honey-bees. In this wilderness of femininity, the patriarchs of the Robertson family closely guard their children and grandchildren against impure, in-authentic performances of gender. Thus, Phil Robertson sternly warns his grandson "Don't marry some yuppie girl," instead authentic, rural men should seek out a "meek, gentle, kind-spirited country girl." The

only litmus test to determine such gendered qualifications is one question: “Can she cook?” But it is not merely feminine identities that pose a potential threat to authentic gender roles. Willie is shown expressing great concern about the authenticity of a young man his daughter has begun dating. However, these concerns are shown to be all for not when the young man successfully kills a wild animal with a gun, demonstrating he is in fact a real redneck man.

Similarly, the strategic demarcating of proper performances of gender becomes a specific point at which that the rural/urban divide is solidified. While there are many other ways that such ‘traditional’ forms of masculinity might be performed, *Duck Dynasty* conflates authentic, rural masculinity with acts that might be necessitated by material conditions of rusticity. The threats to this identity are conflated with the encroachment of the aesthetic of economic affluence associated with the urbane. Thus, the presence or absence of the aesthetic of affluence serves as one litmus test for rural authenticity applied both to members of the Robertson family and other rural individuals within the show.

This twin criterion of ruralness is clearly demarcated through the show’s presentation of Uncle Si. In many respects, Si is presented as inhabiting a more authentic space of rurality than other characters within the show. His manner of speaking is more slow and drawled than Phil Robertson’s family. His preferences of food and drink are often denigrated by other characters in *Duck Dynasty* as being uncouth in their superfluous ruralness. Interesting then, are the ways that Uncle Si performs his rural identity. When Phil and Si are tasked with caring for their granddaughters for an afternoon, Phil explains, “real men don’t fool around” with makeup and jewelry. However, Si to the contrary happily placates the granddaughters by allowing them to give him a makeover, inclusive of make-up and hair styling. Additionally, when an apron needs mending and none of the other characters possess the skill to work a sewing machine, Si happily takes to the task. The explanation for why such a clearly authentic exemplar of ruralness might possess skills contrary to “redneck logic” is a simple one. Si explains in both instances that the isolation and rusticity of his upbringing required him to learn many skills and made him willing to perform many different roles. Of note however is the manner in which the other members of the Robertson family make sense of Si’s variations from the narrow path of redneck logic. While no character ever *explicitly* questions Si’s rurality, his deviances are marked as strange, humorous, or absurd. While these skills and behaviors represent a needed skill set in Si’s rural living, they are not permitted to either ‘count’ as authentic forms of rural expression nor are they granted a rhetorical linkage to rural identity. Thus, although Si is granted some standing as a redneck due to both his familial bonds and lived experiences, the very performative elements this context has produced must be policed to the periphery and coded as mere eccentricities in order to sharpen the content of what constitutes authentic rurality. Thus, while an affinity for rusticity is *part* of the content of authentic ruralness promulgated by the series, an unquestionably authentic rural person must also evidence a seamless performance of gender based in hegemonic masculinity.

“You can keep it, just don’t live in it”

Willie Robertson first explains to the audience that material wealth “never changed who we are,” while attending a black-tie gala. The show seems to be littered with moments of internal tension where the material wealth the Robertsons have access to is pushed to the forefront for the viewer. When the Robertsons want to practice for a family football game, they are given access to a university training facility. When seeking to settle a sibling feud, Jase and Willie decide to

play golf for \$100 a hole at a private country club. Finally, an entire episode of the series is predicated upon the humor, without material consequences, of the Robertsons buying a winery on a whim and quickly running it into the ground. While Phil Robertson may claim he doesn't trust "nerds," he also admits to the viewer that six of his seven siblings (inclusive of himself) earned a college degree. Thus, while the Robertsons may claim that "Hard work and family go hand in hand," while uttering this aphorism, employees of the Robertsons' company are shown actually carrying out the "hard work" described.

In addition to the tensions displayed against material reality in the previously discussed examples, *Duck Dynasty* also displays examples of moments in which the tactical performance of an authentic rural identity is *only* intelligible as *mere* performance. That is, the particular practices invoked do not match the given situation, nor do they fit with other material aspects of the scene. In these instances, certain behaviors and aesthetic choices can be seen as *only* serving the tactical function of marking a person or context symbolically as authentically rural. One of the prime examples of this is the omnipresent nature of camouflage hunting attire, which seems to extend into the most quizzical social situations. For example, when Willie is awoken in order to bail his family out at their country club, he is shown sleeping in camouflage pajamas. While Willie Robertson may indeed have been hiding from wildlife in his bedroom, this seems highly unlikely. Scenes such as this (which appear throughout the show) bring aesthetic elements of the show's rhetoric of rural authenticity to the fore that have no contextual exigency. In this manner, the material context of rurality is strategically backgrounded as a lesser consideration for determining authenticity against the aesthetic of ruralism performed through camouflage.

Beyond these moments of actions and practices out of scene context, the tactically performative nature of the authenticity espoused by the Robertsons is evidenced by the aesthetics of the particular scene that ties every episode together. At the end of every episode of *Duck Dynasty*, the entire Robertson Family is shown praying together before enjoying a family meal. Of note is the juxtaposition of an abundance of food and drink displayed on the common table, against the paper plates and mason jars with which the family chooses to dine. In these moments of episodic closure, the material abundance of the Robertsons' lifestyle is strategically performed with the adornments of an aesthetic that ruralism ascribes to all ruralities.

Finally, the performance of authentic rural identity displayed in *Duck Dynasty* often strategically denigrates the actual materiality of rural life. The aesthetic of the "redneck" is compared to looking like a homeless person and "rednecks" are laughed at for buying the "junk" the Robertsons sell at a yard sale. Additionally, proper behavior is repeatedly defined as anti-rural. Thus, characters are scolded to "Behave, don't act like a country bumpkin" and characters in violation of social expectations are chastised as "redneck idiots." Finally, while extolling the virtues of ruralness, Jase and Willie pause to mock the slow, drawled southern accent of their neighbor "mountain man." Some actual ruralities it seems are not virtuous within the discourse of the series. Instead, the strategically authentic *ideal* of the rural takes precedence, not only as a stand in for rurality, but against it.

Duck Dynasty as Camoface

Ceccarelli (1998) explained that texts as well as their responses are polysemic, inviting differing and sometimes divergent meanings. Indeed, the performances of rural authenticity within *Duck Dynasty* seem to capitalize on and by proxy reify divergent implications for spatially differentiated audiences.

Through the representations of rural life within the show, a metronormative audience may be allowed to confirm widely held, ruralist stereotypes about rural poverty and ignorance. While the Robertson family is repeatedly portrayed as having *access* to urbane wealth, their tactical negotiation of the boundaries of rural authenticity center on the repeated denigration of the urbane as an aesthetic. The implication of this performance is the strategic positioning of the abstract, true rural dweller as not desiring urbane material conditions or economic affluence. Likewise, this representational regime communicates to the non-rural person that rural material privation surely can't be all that bad, after all rednecks love to live 'that way.' Indeed, much of the comedic framing of the show is predicated upon the absurdity of the Robertsons not as outliers of rural habits and tastes but instead as comedic rhetors because of their perceived rural backwardness in a variety of urbane contexts.

Conversely, the rural viewer of *Ducky Dynasty* is caught up in a representational double bind: to have standing as a *real* redneck individuals must *only* prefer at least the aesthetic of rusticity *regardless* of what other options might be available to them; however, the social and material conditions attached to rusticity in a larger cultural context influenced by ruralism foreclose the educational, employment, and healthcare options such individuals find readily accessible in their communities (Bassett, 2003a). Thus, a rural audience is strategically invited to either identify with the representations of rurality presented through the show and potentially accept deleterious living conditions or resist such stereotypes and surrender their own rural authenticity.

My concern with the particular performances of ruralness within *Duck Dynasty* is not that they imply a form of rurality that is completely without a material referent. Instead, *Duck Dynasty* takes a small set of practices and beliefs that are common within *some* ruralities, and amplify their expression to the dearth of all other potential signifiers of ruralness while at the same time cementing these particular traits as the *singular* qualifiers of authentic ruralness. Indeed, many rural individuals experience the harsh realities of rusticity. However, these are the *consequences* of living in some rural locales, not the defining characteristic of rurality at large nor a *choice* of taste on the part of rural individuals.

The tactical performances of the Robertsons bring the *aesthetic* of rusticity to the fore, while also strategically distancing from the material *effects* of such conditions. The Robertsons' framing of rusticity as tied to authenticity, while the immanent experiences of such rusticity are avoided demonstrates the pernicious nature of the strategic implications of *Duck Dynasty*'s performances of rural authenticity. The sum production is a valorization of rusticity and hyper-masculinity that negates many potential ruralities in favor of the truth and value claims of a cultural regime in which "Our society distances rural poverty. We don't want to see it, we don't want to talk about it" to the degree that "the distancing of rural poverty is literal as well as figurative" (Bassett, 2006, p. 4).

Camoface

The strategic implications of *Ducky Dynasty* represent a performance of ruralness that reifies the problematic culture of ruralism. Specifically, through the performance of certain sorts of identity alongside the policing out of others, the show demarcates and truncates the grounds of rural authenticity and in so doing reifies a hegemonic ideological notion of rurality. While these issues might be seen as simply constituting bad television, the implication is far more wider reaching since "society has become a recited society" which is "defined by stories" as well as

“citations of stories, and by the interminable recitation of stories” (de Certeau, 1984/1988, p. 186). Thus, ownership and control of salient, homogenized identities has become key political terrain.

In this way the control of what constitutes authentic ruralness represents a strategic, hegemonic move that limits the political agency of *actual* rural dwellers. This is because “hegemony has also epistemological significance” so that “in so far as it creates a new ideological terrain” such iterations become “a fact of knowledge” (Gramsci, 1971/1989, p. 365). But far from merely changing public opinion, the mediated discursive formation represented in *Duck Dynasty* may have subsumed its supposed referent, so that “in fact they fabricate the terrain, simulate it, use it as a mask, accredit themselves by it, and thus create the scene of their law” (de Certeau, 1984/1988, p. 186). Indeed, the ascendancy of the show corresponded with cultural practices such as churches asking their congregants to participate in “Duck Dynasty Sundays” (WTAE, 2013) involving the wearing of camouflage clothing and focusing on “traditional” rural food and music, and the wearing of hunting garb to mark oneself as “country” (O’Connor, 2013). Previous scholarship (Powell, 1982; Stroman, 1991; Ward & Harrison, 2005) has evidenced that non-majoritarian audiences may internalize prejudicial stereotypes pertaining to their own identity based subject positions presented through mass media. While this is one likely explanation for the manifestation of social phenomena that are referential to *Duck Dynasty*, I believe this is only part of the full story. Beyond merely hailing rural viewers to adopt certain manners of dress, the strategic authenticity of the Robertsons is part of a broader cultural discourse that skews the grid of intelligibility of what constitutes a ‘real’ rural dweller toward the values and truth claims of ruralism.

I refer to the strategic, hegemonic performance of ruralism against ruralities as *camoface*. The phrasing of the term *camoface* is purposeful. Much like performances of other identities that have been termed ‘black face,’ ‘red face,’ ‘yellow face,’ and other similar descriptors, *camoface* is a performance of rural identity that centers derogatory stereotypes as definitive of intelligible otherness for the entertainment of a hegemonic audience. Similarly, like these other derogatory performances *camoface* seeks to accomplish this edification through at least three strategic moves. First, the hegemonic audience is invited to find humor in the supposed eccentricities of the exaggerated, stereotypical, clownish behavior of the other. Second, the performance of difference also serves to reify for a hegemonic audience their assumptions of what the other is ‘really’ like. Finally, as with similar examples of such ‘faced’ performances, the performer does not risk the consequences of experiencing the identity their performance denigrates on camera.

Camoface, as a particular form of strategically authentic performance has several distinct characteristics. First, *camoface* is a performance that is detached from any material referent to the lived implications of rurality. That is, performances of *camoface* rely on promulgating rural authenticity aesthetically while detaching such performances from material consequences of experiencing such aesthetics. Additionally, *camoface* is a strategic performance in so far as it positions a singular, authentic form of rural identity as the only ‘true’ form of rurality. Finally, *camoface* is performed by individuals that do not experience a limiting of political or socio-economic agency due to rural dwelling, yet it is performed *as indicative* of the materially true, authentic representation of the intrinsic behavioral qualities and aesthetic preferences of actual rural persons.

Strategic Authenticity

The status of camoface as a materially delinked performance of authenticity seeps through in multiple points of the narrative arc of *Duck Dynasty*. It is worth nothing, I do not mean to claim that a singular form of authentic ruralness exists. Instead, the strategic form of authenticity presented in *Duck Dynasty* evidences a *complete* unmooring from material rurality as a determining factor of what constitutes authentic identity. Thus, the show presents a supposedly definitive form of rurality consistent with the pejorative assumptions of ruralism that becomes the singular, authentic rurality that all others must be judged against, potentially mitigating the political and social actions available to actual rural individuals.

The implications of this seeming contradiction are important. While it might seem easy to dismiss the irony of the Robertsons displaying their wealth while also berating one another about being real rednecks, this tension displays the larger manner in which camoface functions. By tying the criterion of authenticity to aesthetic choices and love of rusticity, the cultural logic of ruralism is furthered. Within the rhetoric of camoface, it doesn't matter that the Robertsons have access to material wealth because they tactically perform a preference for the aesthetic of the rustic.

In this way, camoface allows the grounds for hegemonic actors to both define the content of a social location that is being deployed for personal gain, while also leaving open the possibility of denigrating others that are forced into that identity category. Rural individuals are therefore both limited in what the boundaries of their identity might be (if they chose to have access to authenticity) while they are also subtly denounced for existing in that very social location. Conversely, the individuals performing camoface are able to both retain access to an authentic rural identity in spite of their wealth, while also having the latitude to reinforce a cultural hierarchy that privileges them.

While the performance of camoface is certainly concerning, the broader implication of camoface's proliferation lies in the ways that it becomes cited and re-performed in broader society. Mass media can take a pedagogic role, instructing consumers in both proper social behavior and identity formation (de Certeau, 1984/1988). Read as pedagogic, performances of camoface not only deny a multiplicity of rural identities, but also serve to discipline rural populations toward the performance of a particular, hegemonic discourse of rurality that is defined by cultural ruralism. Therefore, the performance of camoface becomes the referent that material reality is juxtaposed against. The ultimate implication of this relation between the strategic authenticity of camoface and the lived ruralities of multifarious individuals residing in a plethora of rural communities in the United States is that the measure of what 'real' rural life entails may become the latter measured and defined by the former.

Thus, the critique of camoface is not grounded in the assumption that *a* true expression of rurality exists, or that *a* preferable representation of rural identity is muted by the proliferation of camoface. Indeed, such a stance would be antithetical to the broader critical politics of the rural this article seeks to advance in both its essentializing character and assumed position of epistemic privilege. Instead, camoface is problematic in its suppression of a plethora of potential, lived ruralities. While some of these experiences and embodied performances might indeed reflect *some* of the elements of identity that are advanced by ruralism, the rhetorical character of camoface deploys an ontological violence both in its granting of authenticity to only those expressions of rurality that conform to ruralist assumptions of culture and identity and its simplification of an essentialized rural life. Simply, while some rural persons may indeed prefer "redneck logic" and express a disdain for the urbane, many other individuals residing in the rural United States have material political interests to the contrary of the values of "redneck logic." It

is these ruralities that are not intelligible as authentically rural within camoface. Thus, the critique of camoface is not intended to deny rural persons the ability to be rednecks, but instead to question why a ruralist culture prefers that all of us that experience rurality *must* be rednecks.

Conclusions

Perhaps the strategic nature of camoface is best explained by the words of *Duck Dynasty*'s characters. When chastising his father for continuing to live in his longtime home, despite the family's accrued wealth, Willie explains: "you can keep it, just don't live in it." This off-handed comment speaks to the broader strategic implications of camoface: possessing hegemonic, strategic control of authenticity as it pertains to a particular identity while at the same time retaining a power position that is antithetical to the material needs of the individuals defined by the identity the discourse disciplines

Hegemonic control over what constitutes authenticity may come to bear on rural individuals by contributing to the shaping of discourses pertaining to the practice of daily life in rural communities. These micro-practices of camoface on the part of actual rural dwellers may begin to re-shape their lived identity as well. This is because the narration or speech that one can place themselves within constitutes identity through "practice" (de Certeau, 1984/1988, pp. 77-80) so that "Social life multiplies the gestures and modes of behavior (im)printed by narrative models; it ceaselessly reproduces and accumulates 'copies' of stories" (de Certeau, 1984/1988, p. 186). Thus, rural dwellers living within a mediasphere dominated by performances of camoface must either ascribe to the performed qualities of authenticity, or be interpolated as inauthentic and urbane.

In this way efforts to resist ruralism both socially and academically are confounded by the proliferation of camoface. The policing of the boundaries of authenticity by camoface offers a difficult double bind for both rural persons and scholars interested in researching ruralism and rural populations. Namely, when camoface is understood to constitute authentic ruralness, rural persons may either accept the narrow political and ideological characterizations of ruralism, or, they risk falling outside of the terrain of authenticity and their motives and desires could fail to link up to normative cultural understandings of rurality.

However, seeking ways to re-articulate rurality provides a potential tactic for resistance (Creed & Ching, 1997). In order to trace out some beginning notions of how these tactics might manifest I turn to what Bassett (2003a) terms the "three R's" of combating ruralism: "recognition, role models" and "remediation" (p. 340). This article is an effort to further the process of recognition of the culture of ruralism. While many of the scholars referenced throughout this article have previously elucidated the existence of a culture of ruralism in the United States, the highlighting of camoface sharpens this critique by concretizing the ways in which ruralism is reified not only by non-rural cultural forces, but also by rhetors that purport to represent real rednecks. Additionally, a sustained critique of camoface requires the production of role models. By this I mean at least two things. Firstly, scholars who have experienced rurality as a significant determining factor on their own lives ought to assert their ruralness both as educators and researchers in order to actively increase the visibility of rural identities that run contrary to camoface. Additionally, critical rhetoricians (especially those interested in social movements) ought to find ways to act and research with rural individuals. The mapping of camoface as a strategic rhetoric with detrimental influence is merely the first act of rhetorical criticism. The appropriate rejoinder to this mapping is an engagement in tactical rhetorical invention against performances of camoface. Finally, while the scope of this article is not to offer

political strategies for structural remediation of ruralism, I believe that the critique of camoface provides a meaningful distinction between rural advocates that merely “keep it” against those who have no other options but to “live in it.” This will require rural persons to assert their own ruralities contrary to camoface, and necessitate researchers taking up questions of rural cultural and exclusion in meaningful ways.

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