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The Journal of Applied Communications

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The Impact of Being a Public Organization on the Public's Perceptions of the Florida Forest Service's Brand

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to address how being a public organization affected the public's perceptions of the Florida Forest Service's brand. Focus groups were conducted at different sites across the state with rural and urban residents. The major findings were that the public expected the brand of a public organization to be financially responsible (e.g., justify the purpose of the organization, avoid duplication between public organizations, communicating with the public without wasting money, and generating revenue), provide something valuable to individuals or the public at large (e.g., protecting forests, control through regulations, and aid, such as providing information), and to operate with integrity (e.g., being financially responsibly, communicating clearly with the public, and the organization being fair in balancing public and private interests). This research addresses a gap in research regarding the branding of public organizations. Because the study is limited by being a qualitative study addressing one organization in one state, future research should be conducted to address the transferability of the findings to other settings. This research furthers efforts to foster relationships between public organizations and members of the public by providing guidance for the improvement of the brands of public organizations. In the face of increased scrutiny of and competition between public organizations, the findings of this study can be used to help improve the public's perceptions of public organizations.

Key Words

Brand, public organization, forestry, focus groups

Introduction

Forests cover 751.2 million acres in the U.S., with $200 billion produced each year from domestic forestry products (EPA, 2013). Despite the size and economic value of forests, the forestry industry is often plagued by lack of awareness or misunderstanding among the public. While facts are communicated about forestry, individual personal experiences, observations, beliefs, and values have shown to have a greater affect on the public's understanding of the industry (Bliss, 2000). The future of forestry depends on the industry's ability to communicate the social, environmental, and economic benefits of forestry practices (Bliss, 2000). In many cases, state departments of forestry are ideally positioned to communicate these benefits to the public. However, these departments do not have adequate support to communicate effectively.

Public organizations, such as state departments of forestry, depend on public support for viability (Moore, 1995). As a result, public organizations must represent themselves effectively to ensure their

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long-term success. Public organizations have faced increased competition among themselves and from private organizations in recent decades, which has led to the increased use of private-sector techniques to communicate, but the application of private-sector strategies in public organizations is not always well understood, leading to research of private-sector strategies for public organizations (Butler & Collins, 2005; Laing, 2003; Moore, 1995; Walsh, 1994; Waeraas, 2010; Whelan, Davies, Walsh, & Bourke, 2010). One area of marketing that has been underexplored for public organizations is branding (Waeraas, 2008).

Because of its success in the private sector, branding also has the ability to be successful when applied to public organizations (Butler & Collins, 1995; Laing, 2003; Walsh, 1994). However, the theoretical basis for branding and the creation of brand salience and brand differentiation in public organizations has yet to be explored. A general absence exists for branding literature for public organizations like state departments of forestry (Wæraas, 2008). To identify how branding functions within a public organization, this study addressed how the members of the public perceived the brand of a public organization, specifically a state forest service. By identifying the brand perceptions of this public organization, communicators can identify if branding is a viable option to communicate the benefits of forestry to the public.

Literature Review

Branding

According to Kornberger (2010), "Branding is at once one of the most artificial and yet most real forces in our society" (p. 6). Though intangible, brands are social constructs (Loken, Ahluwalia, & Houston, 2010) that have value for organizations and the public. The familiarity of the brand serves to reduce the public's perceptions of risk and uncertainty for a product and/or service (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). While members of the organization largely dictate its actions (i.e., internal components of the brand), the public's interactions with the organization and its products and services determine the organization's external brand.

Brand differentiation is the extent a brand separates itself from other brands and is an area of branding that receives significant attention from researchers (Ehrenberg, Barnard, & Scriven, 1997). Brand differentiation explains the mental location of the brand relative to its competitors (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). An example could be differences in products' functions (e.g., Jawbone fitness trackers simply monitor activity, while Garmin fitness trackers also monitor distances and heart rate). While the functions of an organization's brand can be copied easily by competitors, the brand's emotional functions are not so easily copied (de Chernatony, 2001). For example, many computer companies sell products that function similarly, but Apple differentiates itself because it has a better brand image than other computer companies, making Apple a more successful brand (Harris Interactive, 2013). An organization can create differentiation through values, culture, people, programs, and assets (Aaker, 1996).

Salience is the extent a brand is accessible in the mind of the public (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009), which occurs internally through presence in the public's memory or externally through presence in the public's surroundings. According to Romaniuk and Sharp (2004), the increased salience also "provides a sense of assurance that the brand will be appropriate for the situation" (p. 335), which also reduces uncertainty for the public (de Chernatony, 2001; Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Tybout & Calkins, 2005). Differentiation can increase salience (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994). Franzen and Moriarty (2009) explain this concept, saying "brands become salient because they somehow distinguish themselves from their surroundings. They are noticed because they are simply different" (p. 173). The colorful exteriors of Apple computers in the late 1990s when competitors typically had grey computers would be an example of using differentiation to increase salience.

Public Organizations and Branding

Public organizations increasingly are using private-sector business and communications strategies, but the application of such strategies, including branding, for public organizations is not well understood (Butler & Collins, 2005; Laing, 2003; Moore, 1995; Walsh, 1994; Waeraas, 2008; Whelan et al., 2010). Whelan et al. stated, "while branding has become more prominent in the public sector, its role with stakeholders is under explored" (p. 1165). One area of stakeholder exploration is the relationship between public organizations and the public, which is the external component of brands (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). By improving its brand, such as increasing satisfaction and improving recognition, a public organization can improve its relationship with its stakeholder groups (Whelan et al., 2010).

A concept related to building relationships with stakeholders is Excellence Theory (Grunig, 1989). A key component of the theory is two-way symmetrical communication between organizations and their stakeholders to ensure an equal relationship occurs (Grunig, 2006). Solid relationships with stakeholders help organizations weather crises (Grunig et al., 2002). The theory also supports including communications personnel in the organization's leadership (Grunig, 2006; Grunig et al., 2002).

The application of private-sector strategies in public organizations is complicated because they are typically more complex than private organizations. First, public organizations need approval from the general public, not just those the organizations directly served (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995). While having a specific audience is traditionally considered important for communications (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994), it may not be necessary in today's globalized and digitally connected society (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010). Second, public organizations have multiple roles and identities that need to be represented to maintain credibility (Hoggett, 2006; Waeraas, 2008). Third, public organizations' purposes differ from private organizations, such as typically providing services instead of products as well as being authoritative entities (Laing, 2003; Walsh, 1994; Waeraas, 2008).

Purpose

To better understand how branding functions in a public organization, the purpose of this study was to address the following research question: How does being a public organization affect brand perceptions for a state forestry agency? The research was prompted by a name and logo change of the Florida Forest Service (FFS), who also funded this research. More than 1 million acres of state forests are managed by FFS (FDACS, n.d.).

Methods

To address the study's purpose, a qualitative approach was used. Qualitative methods seek to provide explanations grounded in real-life situations, as opposed to broad explanations sought in quantitative research (Flick, 2006). Focus groups were the method used to explore FFS's brand. Templeton (1994) defined focus groups as "small, temporary communit[ies], formed for the purpose of the collaborative enterprise of discovery" (p. 4). Through guided group discussion, participants compare and contrast each other's viewpoints (Morgan, 1998b). By guiding the discussion, focus group moderators are able to ensure the group's discussion remains relevant to the research questions (Morgan, 1998b).

FFS is accountable to all state residents, like all public organizations (Moore, 1995). Therefore, focus groups were conducted in four geographically distributed cities. Four of the focus groups consisted of urban participants. Two were in Orlando, one was in Ft. Myers, and one was in Tallahassee. The two rural focus groups were conducted in Gainesville and Tallahassee with participants from surrounding counties. There were 54 participants in the study, with 7 to 10 participating in each group. Krueger (1998a) recommended focus groups range from six to 12 participants. An external marketing firm recruited participants using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), and participants received a $50 incentive for participation.

The following recommendations from Krueger (1998b) were used to develop the moderator's guide: Questions were asked in a conversational tone; questions were "clear, brief, and reasonable" (p. 4); individuals familiar with focus group methodology and FFS provided feedback about questions to help ensure validity (Ary et al., 2010; Morgan, 1998a); questions were developed over two months to allow for sufficient development; questions were open-ended; general questions were asked before specific questions; and positive questions were asked before negative questions. The moderator's guide addressed the current brand of FFS through a range of topics including forests, forest management, government organizations, and FFS's brand materials. Focus groups were less than two hours each (Krueger, 1998b). The same trained moderator was used for each focus group for consistency (Krueger & Casey, 2009), and an assistant moderator and a note taker also were present.

Analysis was a multistep process. The first three steps occurred at the focus groups (Krueger, 1998a): The moderator team listened to participants to ensure the intent of participants' responses were understood; the moderator summarized each discussion and allowed participants to provide clarifications and extra thoughts; and the focus group team debriefed at the end of the sessions to share their interpretations. The next step was the creation of themes for responses (Creswell, 2007), which was accomplished through Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method using WEFT-QDA, a qualitative data analysis program. Emergent coding was used to limit researcher bias. Emergent coding uses the data as the source for codes, as opposed to having predetermined themes (Creswell, 2007). Focus groups also give participants the ability to determine how they share information, which gives further credence to using emergent coding instead of researcher-determined themes (Krueger, 1998a).

Measures were taken to help ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010). One of the measures for ensuring credibility was through triangulation; data source triangulation occurred by collecting data from different locations and individuals, and theoretical triangulation occurred by using information from both branding and non-branding literature to understand the findings of the study (Thurmond, 2001).

Transferability is the extent the findings can be applied to other settings (Ary et al., 2010). The focus groups were audio and video recorded for transcription purposes, which aids transferability. Transcript-based analysis is considered the most rigorous means of focus groups analysis (Krueger, 1998a). Transcript-based analysis helps maintain a richness in the data (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001) and helps ensure accuracy when making interpretations and justifying findings (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2006). As much description as is feasible is provided to help the readers make decisions about the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2007). Data source triangulation also aids transferability (Thurmond, 2001).

Dependability refers to the extent the results would be similar if the study was repeated, similar to reliability in quantitative research, though the notion of using the same methods to reach the same results does not apply to qualitative research (Ary et al., 2010; Flick, 2006). Dependability relies on

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explaining the process from start to finish (Flick, 2006). The audit trail aids this by ensuring an external party can review the study and details of how the results were found (Ary et al., 2010). Data source triangulation also aids dependability (Ary et al., 2010).

Confirmability refers to the general neutrality of the study (Ary et al., 2010). The ability for external review via the audit trail aids confirmability by allowing the external reviewer "to arrive or not arrive at the same conclusions given the same data and context" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 504; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Corroboration of the findings was possible through the peer debriefing and member checking measures used in the study (Ary et al., 2010).

Results

There were three major themes of responses impacting the participants' perceptions of FFS's brand: *financial responsibility, providing something valuable, and the integrity of the organization and its employees*.

Financial Responsibility

This theme specifically dealt with why the organization should receive public funding and how funding should be used. The subthemes were *justify the purpose of the organization*, *duplication of efforts*, *external communications*, and *revenue generation*.

For the first subtheme, participants wanted the organization to *justify the purpose of the organization* because they rely on public funds. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said, "Make it clear as to what they are up to and why money should keep going there because as they talk about budget cuts and whatnot, I get angrier and angrier about the cuts in education." Part of this justification was providing measurable results. The same participant said:

> If people don't understand the importance of the agency, actually they kind of get lost in the shuffle. That becomes even more important when the [people in the government] are looking at where to cut the budgets and whoever has communicated the best and most effectively what they do, why they are important, and shown the measurable results of their work over a succinct period of time; those are the agencies that stay and continue to get money while the others bite the dust and start to look for careers elsewhere.

The second subtheme was participants not wanting to perceive a *duplication of efforts* between different government organizations. Participants were not always able to distinguish clearly between the differences among public organizations. A participant from the second Orlando focus group said, "In order to have all of those things existing, they have to have clearly defined, non-overlapping parameters." This perception that organizations were duplicating each other's efforts stemmed, in part, from participants not understanding the hierarchy and management of public organizations at the state and national levels. A suggestion related to this hierarchy was offered by one of the participants in the urban Tallahassee focus group, who said:

> It seems like you could have one particular regulatory agency. They could probably include all of the state ones there, and the federal ones with another one, and I think probably you could lump some of these as just subdivisions of one big one.

The third subtheme was *external communications* of the organization. Participants' views of how

FFS should communicate were affected by their perceptions of it being a public organization. Many of the participants wanted the organization to communicate its purpose. A Ft. Myers participant said, "Let the community or public know exactly what your services are because obviously we didn't know all that they did for us." On the other hand, some participants did not want a public organization spending money on communicating its purpose, as opposed to spending money accomplishing its purpose. A participant in the first Orlando focus group said: "Isn't their money better spent managing forests than educating us about what they do? I mean, we see the results of what they do, so we don't have to know everything." Some participants favored using websites to lower communication costs. The premise behind this viewpoint for many participants was if someone wanted information about the organization, they could go find the information online. An urban Tallahassee participant said:

> So, killing trees to tell me about them. That would piss me off. (laughter) We are going to stop having mail in about a year or two. Let's just get over it. I really do think electronic communication and in a way that is non-obtrusive. Where … if there is a need to publicize things, just to make it something … not just junk e-mail that you are going to put in your spam filter, but something where there is value to what you are getting from the e-mail so that you don't take yourself off the mailing list.

The fourth subtheme was *revenue generation*. A participant from the second Orlando focus group said: "The public can't support everything, and that is why we are having these cuts. So, agencies need to find clever ways to bring in revenue. They just cannot rely solely on taxes to cover their expenses." A way of creating revenue was mentioned by a Ft. Myers participant, who said, "Like [selling] trees or little bears or whatever they have in the park."

Providing Something Valuable

Participants wanted to ensure public organizations were *providing something valuable* to individuals, the public in general, or natural resources. The subthemes were *protection*, *control*, and *aid*.

The first subtheme was *protection*, which participants valued from government organizations. In reference to police and military, a Ft. Myers participant said: "There would be nothing without them. You know they are there to get your back." Protection also relates to protecting forests. Specifically, participants valued FFS protecting natural resources from misuse. An urban Tallahassee participant said, "You have to have somebody to be the overseer because people will try to take advantage of our natural resources." The participants also valued protecting people and forests from fires. A Gainesville participant said: "They are managing, maybe doing controlled burns and so on. Then we have less worry of major forest fires affecting the area where we may live." Regarding protecting private property, a participant in the first Orlando focus group said, "If they are managing the forests properly, forests won't catch fire and burn down all our neighborhoods like they are in Texas right now." Protection of forests also includes protection from invasive species. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> A good example of forest management, I think would be the Australian pine tree that they had planted all over [the southern part of the state] and then they found out that it had such a negative effect on the environment. … They killed every single one … they could find.

The second subtheme was *control*, which participants expected from public organizations through

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regulations. In regard to traffic laws, an urban Tallahassee participant said: "If there wasn't any regulations, people would be driving all over the place. But we have streets, lights, and everything." In regard to natural resources, a participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> [Regulation's] a dirty word today to a lot of people, but without regulation, you have got chaos. You saw it in the last decade, where you let people go, I mean, totally different spectrum, but on Wall Street. Greed, unfortunately, greed will trump what are our instincts to preserve natural resources. So, I think you have to have regulation, I really do.

In reference to the timber industry, another participant in the second Orlando focus group said, "To make sure they are replanting in the areas that they are using it, so that they are always keeping it, making sure that the forests are still there." While this control and regulation was something participants recognized as necessary, it was also something that could be perceived negatively. Another urban Tallahassee participant said:

> [Regulation is a] necessary evil. I mean there are so many things that we don't even think about. They protect us, they protect the wildlife, protect the forest, the other natural resources. But then sometimes, the evil part of it just being bogged down in … you know, all us of trying to figure out who's on first and what is on second.

The third subtheme is for public organizations to provide *aid*. When asked to share an example of a government organization that was valued, a participant in the first Orlando focus group said:

> The reason why I said [Florida Department of Children and Families] is because I have four kids, I am a single parent, and they help me a lot with my kids. So, you know, I get a lot of help from them. They give a lot of help. They help you a lot.

Many participants were unaware of the assistance FFS provided for private landowners. A rural Tallahassee participant had received assistance from FFS before and said, "I know that is important, but with the reduced value of forestry products over the last few years, that is not nearly as important as it used to be. … But it is still a needed service." Providing education and information was an aspect of the aid subtheme. Another rural Tallahassee participant said:

> I don't know about the state, but the counties have … I don't know what you call it. They do it with farmers. They talk to farmers about how to grow crops and stuff. And foresters or whatever, forestry management, they can go out and … or people can ask questions on their private property about how to manage the trees, the environment on their own land. I think that is important too.

An urban Tallahassee participant said, "They have got the latest information on what is going on with the forests, from a fire standpoint, drought index, and stuff like that." Another part of this education component relates to educating youth. A rural Tallahassee participant said:

> I would think more towards the ones that are going to be a little bit more impressionable, would be younger teenagers. Give them drastic comparisons. Something that has been taken

> care of and still looks great today in comparison to something that has been neglected or destroyed through whatever; oil spills, for example, what can happen if it is not managed properly. And as they are getting older, it is a responsibility that they need to be aware of.

Integrity

The theme of *integrity* of the organization and its employees relates to a broad level of public organizations being expected to be ethical and moral. The subthemes for the integrity theme were *financial responsibility*, *clear communications*, and *fairness of the organization*.

The first subtheme was *financial responsibility*, which relates to the broader financial responsibility theme. This subtheme also could have been placed within the financial responsibility theme as the integrity subtheme. The choice was made for it to be included in the integrity theme because these responses appeared to be treat financial responsibility of the organization as an outgrowth of the organization's overall integrity. One aspect of this subtheme related to the integrity of the individuals within the organization and how they were compensated for their work. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> I think integrity of the entire organization is a standard that people in general expect. We don't want to find out that the chairman of [state fish and wildlife organization] is pulling in [$180,000] a year and works a 20-hour week, six months of the year.

Another aspect of this subtheme was that participants wanted the organization to put incoming monies toward the purpose of the organization. A different participant in the second Orlando focus group asked: "Doesn't everybody want them to be honest and trustworthy and loyal to the cause? You know, everything that you accumulate [financially] needs to go towards what it is you are fighting for." This also related to some participants' preferences for FFS to not spend money communicating its purpose, which was mentioned in the financial responsibility theme.

The next subtheme was *clear communications*. The different aspects of this subtheme amounted to participants wanting clear dialogue between public organizations and the public. A rural Tallahassee participant said: "Are [the people in the government] listening to the people? Or are they making their own decisions?" In recognition of the challenges of communicating with a broad group of people, another rural Tallahassee participant said:

> The group that is going to get benefits from [what the government organization is talking about], they are going to know. Word is going to get back to them that this is available, but how do you get information to a broad populous?

Rural participants were the only ones to mention specific instances where they wished FFS would have communicated with them directly. A third rural Tallahassee participant wanted to be forewarned of controlled burns, and said:

> My son has asthma. I wish they would let us know when they are going to do a controlled burn. … No notice, except when you drive up the road, you have got a sign there, "Turn your lights on, smoke ahead."

While participants wanted clear communications and many wanted the organization to commu-

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nicate with everyone, not all participants wanted public organizations to communicate with all members of the public. A Gainesville participant said: "I don't see them calling everybody or e-mailing. Just have a website. Times are tough. I don't see them wasting all that money on postage and things like that. They need to spend it on saving forests." Some participants thought public organizations intentionally did not share information. A participant in the first Orlando focus group said: "It seems like it is real hush-hush. Everybody wants to keep it to their own little kingdom. Nobody wants to share," to which another participant said, "As a former federal employee, like you, we experienced all of that first hand in our little fiefdoms."

The third subtheme was *fairness of the organization*, which amounted to balancing multiple interests in its actions. This balancing of interests can be specific to individuals or broader fairness of balancing the wants and needs of businesses and other private parties. For FFS, interests to balance included business and natural resources. Participants perceived one of the major threats to forests was development. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said, "People just look at the immediate benefits of this project or that project and don't look at the long-term effects of deforestation." This balancing of interests related to the protection function participants valued. In response to being provided a definition of forest management, participants were asked how their perceptions of forest management were different than their perceptions before hearing the definition. Another participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> Well, maybe even more protection, because if you find that there is some kind of natural resource there and then all of a sudden everyone is saying well then, take the forest down and get the natural resource. If it's protected, then keep it protected.

One aspect of fairness in the organization is thinking beyond immediate benefits. A Ft. Myers participant said, "I think planning for the next generation or generations to come." Specific to the forestry industry, a third participant in the second Orlando focus group said: "Forestry is a huge industry. From what I understand, they have [a] 16.6 billion dollar industry in [the state]. I would assume that [FFS] is all over that to make sure that it stays a sustainable industry."

Conclusions & Implications

An important characteristic of the FFS brand is that it represents a public organization. Participants' perceptions of the FFS brand and how the brand should communicate were affected by FFS being a public organization. The themes that affected brand perceptions were *financial responsibility, providing something valuable,* and *integrity.*

The first theme was an expectation of *financial responsibility*. This included justifying the purpose of the organization and the organization having a distinct purpose from similar organizations. This is important given the political and financial climate that has led to cuts in government spending (Chernew et al., 2010). Among focus group participants, there was a lack of FSS brand salience and differentiation, making it difficult for participants to establish how the organization is distinct from similar organizations. While many participants wanted FFS to increase communications to achieve salience and differentiation, others did not want FFS spending money communicating its purpose. Instead, they wanted FFS to spend money accomplishing its purpose, which is in line with past work (Whelan et al., 2010). Awareness needs to precede brand salience and differentiation. Public organizations are in a difficult situation because they cannot assign as many of resources to improve awareness, which means public organizations will have a difficult time demonstrating a distinct purpose from other organizations. While functional aspects of brands and organizations are easy to copy (de Chernatony, 2001), participants did not want public organizations to overlap in their functions because it was perceived as misuse of public resources. As long as public organizations maintain distinct functions, they can avoid depending solely on emotional differentiation for the success of their brands. They can instead rely on their organizational characteristics to differentiate themselves from similar organizations (Aaker, 1996). The results of this theme indicate public organizations have an increased need to rely on internal brand characteristics, such as functions and services, to improve the brand because the public wants to see clear distinctions among public organizations. This theme also indicates traditional external communications of public organizations are handicapped because of negative perceptions related to communication that is not explicitly tied to the purpose of the organization. Communications can still occur, but they need to be tied to the organization's purpose, which relates to the next theme.

The second theme was *providing something valuable* to individuals, the public as a whole, and/or natural resources. This finding is in line with public organizations' need for public value to be viable (Hoggett, 2006). Protection of people and/or resources was one area that was valued. While this included protection such as that provided by the police, protection that occurred through natural resource management also was valued. Participants held high regard for control through regulation by public organizations, which is a key characteristic of public organizations (Walsh, 1994). While some participants thought regulation could be overdone, they also perceived it was necessary to provide order. Organizations that provide aid, such as helping families, were perceived positively. Valuing the multiple roles of public organizations is reflective of the view that public organizations are complex and need to represent their multiple roles (Hoggett, 2006). Even though not all participants perceived immediate benefits from the FFS's activities, FFS still needs the entire public's approval as a public organization (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995). While external communications will be limited to avoid perceptions of financial mismanagement, communication that helps the organization accomplish its purpose is still possible. As it relates to the second theme, communications for public organizations that are geared toward the concepts of protection (e.g., commercials promoting wildfire prevention activities by the public), control (e.g., communicating regulations related to state forests), and aid (e.g., communicating about landowner-assistance programs) should be perceived positively.

There was an expectation for public organizations and their employees to have *integrity*, which was the third theme. Part of this expectation related to the financial responsibility expectation stated earlier. The participants wanted to be sure employees were doing the requisite amount of work to justify their salaries. Participants also wanted to know money going into the organization was being spent accomplishing its purpose, which affected perceptions of external communications. Integrity also related to the overall fairness of the organization. It was expected for public organizations to balance multiple interests. This balancing of interests related to the idea of control through regulation for FFS because it was believed private interests would look at short-term benefits of forestry activities as opposed to the long-term detriments of unrestricted industrial and developmental uses of natural resources. FFS can focus on a message of protecting natural resources to improve brand salience and differentiation, but if the employees and the organization do not work toward this mission, the brand could be hurt by a loss in credibility (Waeraas, 2008, 2010). Credibility improves the chances for brand and communication campaign success (Ehrenberg et al., 1997; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). Clear communications between public organizations and the public was desired, though not all participants believed it was necessary for FFS to communicate with the entire public, only those directly interacting with forests, such as landowners. The expectation for communications between the public and the organization was two-way in that it was expected for public organizations to openly communicate to the public, and public organizations were expected to listen to the public. Two-way communications is an important aspect of excellence in public relations and in line with the assertion that public organizations need two-way dialogue to maintain legitimacy (Grunig, 2006; Walsh, 1994). The two-way dialogue is also necessary for public organizations to go beyond providing value to the point of using a positive brand to be responsive to the needs and perspective of stakeholders (Whelan et al., 2010), which improves brand relationships that help organizations weather crises (Grunig et al., 2002).

The overarching implications of this study relate to how public organizations' brands are perceived and how professionals can communicate about them. De Chernatony (2001) likened brands to icebergs: The external part that is seen (e.g., logos, external communications, etc.) is a much smaller component of what a brand is, compared to the inner part not seen below the surface (e.g., the employees, the decisions of organizational leadership, etc.). What the public sees and ultimately interacts with in terms of the external brand of the organization is going to be greatly impacted by the internal components of the brand for all organizations. For public organizations, this disparity is even more pronounced as indicated in this study. External communications of the organization are going to be more limited because of the potential for excessive communication to be perceived as financial mismanagement, limiting the amount of external branding that occurs. This puts more importance on the internal brand of the organization (e.g., the purpose of the organization, acting with integrity, etc.). The external branding that does occur will have more limited opportunities, giving public organizations smaller margins for error when communicating with the public, meaning the external communications that do occur need to be effective and efficient.

Recommendations

For Branding Public Organizations

Public organizations face a difficult task to improve their brands. It is paramount for public organizations to leverage existing resources in branding, starting with the organization's employees. More specifically, the organization and its employees need to operate with integrity. Even if a public organization's values and aims are positively received through external communications, the brand will be hurt if the organization and its employees do not embody those values in their actions (Waeraas, 2010).

Internal structures are the largest components of brands and are employee-driven (de Chernatony, 2001). Employees are representatives of the brand through their interactions with the public (de Chernatony, 2001; Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). As such, employees must be on the same page as the organization and embody a shared identity. The results of this study indicate FFS's brand lacked salience and differentiation with the public. Increasing interactions between FFS's employees and the public could improve the brand's salience and differentiation, but these interactions need to positively and accurately represent the brand.

An important component of improving the brand of public organizations is to ensure that communications personnel are a part of an organization's leadership, which increases the likelihood of success for the internal and external communications of organizations (Grunig, 2006; Grunig et al., 2002). As it relates to the brand of the organization, having communications personnel in the organizational leadership is important because brand strategy should be an extension and contributor to the organization's overall strategy (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009).

As for promoting the organization's brand to the public, external communications of the organization should be geared toward providing a public good, such as public service announcements and informational campaigns, instead of simply promoting the organization, which could be harm the perceived integrity of the organization (Whelan et al., 2010). Public service announcements and informational campaigns promote the brand while also providing a valuable public function without harming the brand's credibility. While the internal component of the brand is important to foster, the external components of the brand, such as differentiation and salience, are still important to the brand's overall success (Ehrenberg et al., 1997; Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004). As stated earlier, the FFS brand lacked salience and differentiation. A positive external brand is particularly important for public organizations, given that public organizations need public support to maintain legitimacy (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995). Brands can help improve relationships between public organizations and members of the public (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Whelan et al., 2010). The idea of open communications with the public is in line with Excellence Theory in public relations, which supports a two-way symmetrical communication model between organizations and stakeholders (Grunig, 1989).

For Future Research

The first recommendation for future research is to address the transferability of the findings, which were limited by addressing one public organization in one state that operated in a specific natural resources context. While the results may apply to other settings, it cannot be made certain until similar studies occur with other organizations. In particular, a lot of variability exists among public organizations, which could cause differences to occur (Laing, 2003).

The second recommendation is to further research perceptions of public organizations' communications. FFS's brand lacked salience and differentiation, which could be improved by increasing communications with the public, but that solution is problematic given the potential for communications promoting the organization to be perceived negatively (Whelan et al., 2010). The participants wanted public organizations to communicate with the public, but certain types of communications might not be well received. Research needs to determine how public organizations can communicate externally to improve brand perceptions without negative effects given public organizations' dependence on public perception (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995).

The third recommendation, which relates to the prior recommendation, is to address the audience public organizations need to be communicating with. With whom public organizations should be communicating garnered differing perceptions from participants, ranging from everyone to only groups the FFS interacts with directly. Communication efforts are affected by audience selection. Generally, audience segmentation is less cost-prohibitive and is considered more effective, but that notion may be outdated in today's globalized and digitally connected society (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010; Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). Related to the first recommendation for research, work also should address audience selection for various organizations, including scope (e.g., national and state) and context (e.g., natural resources and public health), given the differences between types of public organizations (Laing, 2003).

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Research

The Pastoral Fantasy on the Silver Screen: The Influence of Film on American Cultural Memory of the Agrarian Landscape

Annie R. Specht and Tracy Rutherford

Abstract

Entertainment media are a powerful source of cultural influence. Films are especially adept at capturing and preserving for posterity the attitudes, actions, and landscapes of historical events and eras, making them part of cultural memory — society's shared recollection of past events as depicted in cultural artifacts. Nowhere is this ability better demonstrated than in cinematic portrayals of American agrarian life. In 2001, the Kellogg Institute found Americans recall agricultural landscapes as a sort of pastoral fantasy of rolling green hills, forests, and pristine fields crisscrossed by dirt roads. These images, which constitute Americans' shared cultural memory of agrarian existence, may have been influenced by film portrayals of agriculture. For this study, nine films that met criteria for inclusion of agricultural imagery, cultural significance, and release at least 10 years prior to the Kellogg study were content-analyzed for their visual and thematic adherence to the pastoral fantasy described by Kellogg respondents. Of those films, only two presented agrarian imagery that did not conform to the pastoral fantasy, including depictions of a West Texas cattle ranch at the height of summer and a Midwestern farm muddied by fall harvest. The remaining films contained imagery strongly associated with the pastoral fantasy, indicating they may serve as vehicles for traditional agricultural themes.

Key Words

Agriculture, cultural memory, film, visual imagery

Introduction

Entertainment is embedded in humanity's understanding of culture. Per Stromberg (2011), "entertainment is by now so thoroughly woven into the fabric of our existence [that] … the culture of entertainment is arguably the most influential ideological system on the planet" (p. 3). History is constantly being recreated and repackaged for successive generations in film and television dramas, comedies, and documentaries (Eley, 2001; Steveker, 2009). Film provides a means of historical recollection, contextualization, and even rehabilitation: As movies capture the oeuvre of a particular era, they also preserve for successive generations the attitudes, actions, and landscapes of bygone days as framed by screenwriters, directors, and producers (Caldwell, 2008). The real power of entertainment media, therefore, lies in their ability to alter and naturalize specific interpretations of sociocultural phenomena (Chadwick, 2002).

Agricultural production in the United States is limited to a fraction of the nation's population, though the food and fiber industry once reigned as the primary occupation of the majority of Ameri-

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cans (Conkin, 2008; Hurt, 2002; Kolodny, 1975). As the nation has moved away from its agricultural foundations, a sort of mythology of the agrarian U.S. has emerged, hearkening back to — and even yearning for — the bucolic imagery of pre-industrial rural America. Marx (1964) notes this fantastic portrayal has pervaded American culture for centuries, culminating in cultural symbols replete with images of "a fresh green landscape … a virgin continent!" (p. 3).

This "agrarian myth" (Appleby, 1982) has been in part shaped by entertainment media; to understand society's cultural construction of U.S. agriculture, we must first understand the apparatuses through which Americans glean their knowledge about the food and fiber industry. To date, little research has been done to describe and catalog entertainment media portrayals of food and fiber production and their influences on public perception (Holt & Cartmell, 2013; Ruth, Lundy, & Park, 2005). As part of a larger endeavor to aggregate and analyze media texts that describe, discuss, or portray American agriculture, this study was undertaken to explicate how films have created and reified the pastoral ideal of rural American life in fulfillment of National Research Agenda Priority 1: Public and Policy Maker Understanding of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Doerfert, 2011).

Literature Review

The mechanism through which visual and narrative discourses are crystallized and preserved in the collective mind — how they come to constitute social reality — is cultural memory. Since its inception, the term has been used to describe a wide array of phenomena "ranging from individual acts of remembering in a social context to group memory … to national memory with its 'invented traditions,' and finally to the host of transnational *lieux de mémoire* such as the Holocaust and 9/11" (Erll, 2008a, p. 2). "Cultural memory," therefore, is a broad conceptual framework that transcends traditional scholarly boundaries of social, material, and mental aspects of human life.

Interest in cultural memory grew in the late 1980s and early 1990s as traditional memory scholars found themselves increasingly studying questions of identity, the politicization of imagery, and the ability of narrative to shape historical thought (Sturken, 2008). Cultural memory conceptually redefines memories as "narratives, as fluid and mediated cultural and personal traces of the past" (Sturken, 2008, p. 74), rather than semi-permanent historical artifacts. In short, cultural memory may be defined as "the store of background knowledge that one calls upon when interpreting the everyday commonsense world" (Wekesa, 2012, p. 235; Werner, 2003) — a store dependent upon the individual's experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and values.

Film and television tend to present an idealized and sentimentalized version of a culture's history to their audiences:

> Fictional media … are characterized by their power to shape the collective imagination of the past in a way that is truly fascinating for the literary scholar (and somewhat alarming for the historian) … [possessing] the potential to generate and mold images of the past which will be retained by whole generations. (Erll, 2008b, p. 389)

These media mainstream cultural memory toward sociocultural norms and allow audiences to "discover a past that makes the present more tolerable" (Anderson, 2001, p. 23).

In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson declared filmmaking to be "writing history in lightning" (Hansen, 2001, p. 128) after viewing *Birth of a Nation*. The film, which depicted an antebellum Southern society in which the Ku Klux Klan protected innocent white women and children from the threat of freed Blacks, set the stage for continued mythmaking on the silver screen. Hansen (2001)

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compared *Birth* to Steven Spielberg's 1993 Holocaust opus *Schindler's List*, stating both films "managed to catalyze contesting points of view but … they make visible the contestation among various and unequal discursive arenas in their effort to lay claim to what and how a nation remembers" (p. 127).

In her analysis of *Schindler's List*, Hansen (2001) described the film as a "Hollywood product" (p. 131). Spielberg's work, Hansen argued, suffers from a Barthesian "reality effect," in which the film not only subsumes the tropes, themes, and images of previous Holocaust movies but also "uses them to assert its own truth claims for history" (2001, p. 132). *Schindler's List*, Hansen contended, also perpetuates anti-Semitic stereotypes — "money-grubbing Jews, Jew-as-eternal-victim" — while decrying the inhuman treatment of those same characters (2001, p. 132). In this way, the film attempts to present an idealized picture of an appalling event while at the same time failing to refute the negative characterization of the victims themselves.

Cultural memory provides a flexible, innovative framework for the study of entertainment media portrayals of sociocultural issues, events, and epochs. This study focuses on a particular industry integral to culture, economy, and history of the United States: agriculture.

Methods

Film has long been studied as an important cultural artifact; this study treats feature films as texts for a semiotic, or visual sign-based, content analysis. Content analysis is defined by Krippendorff (2004) as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). The term "context" deserves special attention: As McKee (2001) notes, "There is no way that we can attempt to understand how a text might be interpreted without first asking, Interpreted by whom, and in what context?" (p. 138). Content analysis cannot prove or disprove whether or not a text reflects reality; the purpose of content analysis is to interpret texts as artifacts of particular sociocultural contexts (Crawford, 1988).

Text Selection

For inclusion in this study, texts met three criteria: They incorporated post-industrial agriculture as a plot device and/or setting; fulfilled the requirements to be considered "culturally significant," operationally defined by the researcher as receiving recognition for excellence and/or wide viewership; and were produced and distributed between 1950 — the dawn of modern agriculture — and 1990. The National Film Preservation Board (NFPB) states films cannot be considered "culturally significant" until 10 years after their release; 1990 marks approximately 10 years prior to the collection of data that grounds the semiotic framework of this study.

Texts were identified as agriculture-related using keyword searches on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), an online resource that compiles development, distribution, box office, and thematic information related to films, television programs, performers, production personnel, and fictional characters ("IMDB Database Statistics," 2012). To develop a substantive sample for analysis, a variety of keywords were used, including "farm," "farmer," "agriculture," and "rural," with snowball sampling effected using the "Find Similar Titles" command.

Coding

Social semiotic codes classify and frame relationships among meanings, their realizations, and their contexts (Thibault, 1991; Bernstein, 1981). The selected texts were coded into a typology based on the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's study of perceptions of American rural life. The Kellogg study, conducted in late 2001, reported the results of more than 200 telephone interviews with rural, suburban, and urban Americans. The Kellogg study unearthed three primary themes related to perceptions of the rural United States that are directly connected to the nation's food and fiber system: *the pastoral rural landscape*, *the traditional family farm*, and *the decline of the agrarian tradition*. This paper focuses on the first of these: the pastoral fantasy as described by Kellogg study respondents.

The pastoral fantasy.

Based on the results of the Kellogg study, the most common perceptions of rural America are tied to the bucolic landscape. A majority of respondents described rural America as a farm-filled pastoral dream world:

> Respondents' notions of rural America are dominated by images of the family farm, crops and pastures … Family members toiling over a small farm stand at the center of the painting, but in the background are broad brushstrokes of rolling hills, open space, abundant trees, ditch banks and dirt roads. Taken together, this landscape comprises what many respondents refer to as "the country." (Kellogg, 2002, p. 4)

Results

Nine texts met the criteria for selection in the study, beginning with 1955's *Oklahoma!* and culminating with 1989's *Field of Dreams*. These films represent a wide variety of production varieties and commodities, ranging from small livestock farms to massive produce operations.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (1955)

Oklahoma! (Hornblow, Jr., & Zinneman, 1955) is considered a classic film of the movie-musical genre. The film, adapted from the Rodgers and Hammerstein stage production of the same name, was directed by Fred Zinneman with cinematography by Robert Surtees ("*Oklahoma!*", n.d.). The stage play and film provide a slice-of-life homage to a tightknit agricultural community in Oklahoma Territory circa 1906. The plot details the turbulent romance between cowboy Curly McClain (Gordon MacRae) and his headstrong amour, Laurey Williams (Shirley Jones), which is complicated by the presence of Jud Fry, the lecherous hired hand who runs Laurey's small farm. Underscoring the romantic foibles of the community's young people is a current of tension between the footloose cowboys and the farmers who have more recently settled the territory.

Oklahoma! is rife with imagery related to the agrarian ideal. The film's opening credits fade in over a still shot of a traditional farm scene: a red barn surrounded by white fence, haystacks dotting the landscape, and a tidy yellow farmhouse (see *Figure 1*). Following the credits, the camera pans to Curly, greeting the day on horseback to the tune of "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin.'" A long tracking shot follows Curly as he rides past a field of waving green corn silhouetted against a brilliant blue sky and a pasture full of well-fed, bald-faced cattle. (These tracking shots are especially effective thanks to the film's screen ratio: *Oklahoma!* was shot simultaneously in Cinemascope and Todd-AO, two widescreen formats that allowed the filmmakers to take advantage of the natural scenery in wide shots and to compensate for the movement of the actors during dance sequences and large musical numbers.) Curley's destination is the home of Laurey and her Aunt Eller, the picturesque homestead from the opening credits.

Figure 1. Laurey and Aunt Eller's homestead from the film *Oklahoma!* (Hornblow, Jr., & Zinneman, 1955).

Elia Kazan's *East of Eden* (1955)

In 1955, Warner Brothers and director Elia Kazan released *East of Eden* (Kazan, 1955), an adaptation of John Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name ("*East of Eden*," n.d.). *East of Eden*, Steinbeck's variation of the Biblical tale of Cain and Abel, is set in 1917 in Salinas, California, and tells the story of prosperous farmer Adam Trask (Raymond Massey) and his twin sons, Cal (James Dean) and Aron (Richard Davalos). Adam, who longs to be a man of "great ideas," attempts to create a refrigerated train car to carry his produce to New York City. When the project fails, he loses his investment. Seeking his father's approval, Cal invests in bean production, believing the incipient war with Germany will raise the market value of his crop. The gamble pays off, and Cal gives the profits to his father as a birthday gift. Adam rejects Cal's money, being morally opposed to war profiteering; in retaliation, Cal shares an upsetting family secret with Aron, who decides to join the army. Adam is felled by a stroke, and Cal remains behind care for his father.

In his review of *East of Eden*, *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther remarked upon director Elia Kazan's virtuosic filmmaking:

> The use that Mr. Kazan has made of CinemaScope and color in capturing expanse and mood in his California settings is almost beyond compare. His views of verdant farmlands in the famous Salinas "salad bowl," sharply focused to the horizon in the sunshine, are fairly fragrant with atmosphere. (Crowther, 1955, para. 5)

Like Steinbeck's novel, the film allegorically transforms the California countryside into Eden itself: a rich paradise of green fields where mankind may flourish. As Crowther noted, director of photography Ted McCord's palette is deeply saturated, the colors lush, the expanses wide, thanks in large part to the contemporary film technologies of Technicolor and Cinemascope (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 2. Adam Trask oversees harvest in the lush fields in the Salinas Valley (Kazan, 1955).

George Stevens' *Giant* (1956)

In 1956, American audiences were introduced to *Giant* (Ginsburg & Stevens, 1956), a sweeping, oversized ode to the state of Texas based on the novel of the same name by Edna Ferber. Helmed by George Stevens, *Giant* was filmed on location in Marfa, Texas ("*Giant*," n.d.). *Giant* follows the Benedict family of Reata from the days of scion Bick (Rock Hudson) and his East-Coast-bred wife Leslie's (Elizabeth Taylor) marriage in the early 1920s to the oil boom of the 1940s and '50s. While wildcatter ranch hand Jett Rink builds an oil empire, Bick and Leslie raise three children and face the turbulent sociocultural changes of life in 20th Century Texas.

The pastoral fantasy is traditionally associated with rolling green hills and copious trees: imagery that is somewhat at odds with *Giant*'s more desolate West Texas setting. However, the film does pay homage to popular perceptions of rural America. The opening scenes, filmed in rural Virginia, are a kaleidoscope of verdant hues, the hills lined with white fence and dotted with farmhouses and wooden barns (see *Figure 3*). The agrarian gentility of the East Coast countryside is a stark contrast to later scenes set at Reata (see *Figure 4*).

Figure 3. Leslie and her father take in the scenery of their Maryland horse farm (Ginsburg & Stevens, 1956).

Figure 4. Reata's ranch house looms above its desolate West Texas setting (Ginsburg & Stevens, 1956).

Charles Nichols and Iwao Takamoto's *Charlotte's Web* (1973)

Produced by Hanna-Barbera and directed by Charles Nichols and Iwao Takamoto ("*Charlotte's Web,*" n.d.), *Charlotte's Web* (Barbera, Hanna, Nichols, & Takamoto, 1973) reached theaters more than 20 years after the publication of its eponymous novel. Though not a box-office hit when it debuted in theaters in March 1973, *Charlotte's Web* became a family classic upon its release on VHS in the early 1990s. Set on a New England farm in the 1980s, *Charlotte's Web* follows the titular spider (voiced by Debbie Reynolds) and her porcine companion Wilbur (Henry Gibson) from Wilbur's arrival from the Arable farm — where he has been spoiled by Fern (Pamelyn Ferdin), farmer John Arable's pre-teen daughter — and subsequent discovery of his inevitable fate at the hands of new owner Homer Zuckerman (Bob Holt) to the county fair, where Wilbur is honored for his exceptional qualities, thanks in large part to Charlotte's ingenious campaign on his behalf.

Charlotte's Web represents an amalgam of elements inherent to the pastoral fantasy. So powerful is the film's adherence to the conventional portrayal of American agrarian life that the narrator (Rex Allen) describes the rural landscape's flush of beauty in the springtime: "But to me, there's no place more wonderful than a farm in springtime, when the sun is just lifting on the skyline … Buds swell into blossoms. Eggs hatch. Young are born. Everything's off to a fresh start, and everything is good and busy and brand new." Befitting a children's film, the animation's color palette is rich and vibrant, taking full advantage of the bucolic landscape and agrarian subject matter. The film's visual background, designed by art directors Ray Aragon, Paul Julian, and Bob Singer ("*Charlotte's Web,*" n.d.), is a patchwork of fields — a reflection, perhaps, of heroine Fern Arable's surname — peppered with farm buildings, green forests, and winding dirt roads (see *Figure 5*).

Figure 5. Homer Zuckerman drives through the scenic New England countryside (Barbera, Hanna, Nichols, & Takamoto, 1973).

Robert Benton's *Places in the Heart* (1984)

Set in rural Texas during the Great Depression and filmed on location in Waxahachie, *Places in the Heart* (Donovan & Benton, 1984) was written and directed by Oscar-nominee Robert Benton ("*Places in the Heart*," n.d.). The film revolves around the struggles faced by widow Edna Spalding (Sally Field) as she fights foreclosure on the family farm. When a drifter named Moze (Danny Glover) offers his expertise in cotton production, Edna jumps at the chance to turn the farm into a profitable business and keep the local bankers at bay. She also takes in a blind boarder (John Malkovich), who, though he wants nothing more than to be left alone when he arrives, quickly adapts to life on the farm with Edna, her two children, and Moze.

Places in the Heart was based on writer-director Robert Benton's own experiences growing up in Waxahachie, Texas, in the 1930s ("*Places in the Heart*," n.d.). *New York Times* film critic Vincent Canby (1984) wrote of Néstor Almendros's cinematography: "They have given the film the idealized look of the work by some of the better, now-anonymous painters who, supported by Federal subsidies during the Depression, traveled around the country covering the walls of public buildings, in small towns and large" (para. 7). As the film progresses, the beauty of East Texan agriculture comes even closer to the forefront. The day of Moze's arrival dawns beautifully: a bright sunrise over the horizon complemented by a rural score of chirping birds and lowing cattle. As the Spaldings' cotton fields bloom with snow-white bolls, the camera pulls away from a close-up of Edna, Moze, and the children feverishly picking (see *Figure 6*) to reveal the remaining acreage left to tend. The moment is clearly intended to emphasize the Sisyphean task ahead of the group, but the shot also depicts the rugged splendor of the harvest.

Figure 6. Edna and her family struggle to pick cotton in the blazing Texas heat (Donovan & Benton, 1984).

William Witliff's *Country* (1984)

Distributed by Touchstone Pictures, *Country* (Lange, Witliff, & Pearce, 1984) was written by William D. Witliff and filmed primarily in rural Readlyn, Iowa ("*Country*," n.d.). Witliff co-produced the movie with Jessica Lange, who stars as Jewell Ivy, an Iowa farm wife whose husband, Gil (Sam Shepard), runs her family's sheep farm with the help of her aging father, Otis (Wilford Brimley). After a tornado destroys part of their corn crop, the Ivy family faces the default of their Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) loans and the loss of the farm, which has been in Jewell's family for generations. The struggle for the land tears at the family, leading Jewell to separate from her husband. However, the suicide of a local farmer harassed by FmHA officials eventually inspires the community to turn against the government administrators, and the Ivy family reunites to fight for their property.

Country is one of the few agriculture-themed films that does not cater to bucolic depictions of farm life in rural America. Roger Shearman and David M. Walsh's cinematography ("*Country*," n.d.) is spare, as Ebert (1984b) notes: The filmmakers seemingly tried to "avoid pulling back into 'Big Country' cliché shots" (para. 1). The landscapes are not green and sumptuous; spring and summer have long past by the Ivy farm. Instead of the blazing sun and heat of a summer setting, the audience is treated to an Iowa harvest and, later, a bleak Midwestern winter. The film opens with Jewell Ivy taking lunch to her husband, son, and father as they toil in the cornfields of their farm. The men are busy unloading seed corn from a rusting combine into an aging truck (see *Figure 7*). The land is fecund but not lush, the cornstalks bowing to the elements rather than reaching for the sky — a visual motif later employed by 1989's *Field of Dreams*. When winter arrives, the snowfall does not cover the grime of production but highlights the messiness of farm life as it sinks into tire ruts and puddles.

Figure 7. Gil and Carlisle Ivy bring in the harvest on a chilly Midwestern fall day (Lange, Witliff, & Pearce, 1984).

Mark Rydell's *The River* (1984)

The River (Cortes, Lewis, & Rydell, 1984), written by Robert Dillon and Julian Barry and directed by Mark Rydell ("*The River*," n.d.), completes the trio of agriculture-themed films released in 1984. *New York Times* writer Esther B. Fein (1984) wrote of the three films: "All three movies contain elements of a family's devotion to their farm, a devastating force of nature, an unsympathetic bureaucracy and a strong-willed woman who binds her family during adversity" (para. 4). In *The River*, that strong-willed woman is Mae Garvey (Sissy Spacek). After losing a spring corn planting to devastating flooding, Mae and her husband, Tom (Mel Gibson), seek help from the local bank, where they discover they are at risk of foreclosure. Tom travels south to work as a scab in a steel mill to avoid selling the farm to local entrepreneur Joe Wade (Scott Glenn), but when he returns for the fall harvest, floods once again threaten the Garveys' livelihood.

The River shares with *Country* a number of thematic and even narrative elements, but the differences in their cinematography are glaring. Unlike the stark, realist representation of Midwestern agriculture depicted in *Country*, *The River* turns the Tennessee Valley into a picture postcard of rural beauty. Under the supervision of cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond ("*The River*," n.d.), sunrises and sunsets caress the ramshackle but picturesque Garvey farm with golden light (see *Figure 8*); Tennessee hills blaze with fall color as harvest approaches; tall green stalks of corn wave in the summer breeze; even the oft-terrifying river occasionally deigns to trickle peacefully through the landscape.

Figure 8. Despite recent flood damage, the Garvey farm at sunrise is a beautiful sight (Cortes, Lewis, & Rydell, 1984).

Perhaps most interesting element of the film's visual magnificence is its creation. The beauty of the Tennessee wilderness is Nature's own, but the filmmakers fashioned the Garvey farm themselves: "The land was turned into the Garvey farm. Workers combined old, worn wood with artificially-aged [sic] lumber to build the farmhouse, barn and various chicken coops, corrals and pigsties on the property, so that they would blend in with the century-old homesteads in the valley" (Fein, 1984, para. 14). The farm had to be fabricated to fulfill both the film's narrative and the director's dramatic vision for the work. The finished product seems incomplete, however, especially compared to the authenticity of *Country*'s set decoration. The barn, though antiqued, feels orderly, the old harnesses and tools hung just so, the cattle residing in individual stalls, the goats roaming the property freely.

Peter Weir's *Witness* (1985)

In 1985, director Peter Weir ("*Witness*," n.d.) introduced American film audiences to the Amish, a conservative sect of German Anabaptists, in his film *Witness* (Feldman & Weir, 1985). The movie tells the fish-out-of-water tale of John Book (Harrison Ford), a Philadelphia police detective who travels to rural Pennsylvania to protect Samuel Lapp (Lukas Haas), the young Amish witness to a gruesome homicide, and his mother, Rachel (Kelly McGillis). As Book adjusts to life among the Amish community, the trio eludes two crooked police officers until a dramatic gunfight at the Lapp farm spells the denouement of the case and Book's budding relationship with Rachel Lapp.

Critics considered the film's cinematography (by director of photography John Seale ["*Witness*," n.d.]) a highlight, emphasizing as it did the pristine farmland, dirt roads, and undulating landscape of eastern Pennsylvania. So beautiful were these depictions of idyllic Amish country that Pauline Kael, the renowned reviewer for the *New Yorker*, wrote of the film's depiction of rural life: "'Witness' seems to take its view of the Amish from a quaint dreamland, a Brigadoon of tall golden wheat and shiny-clean faces" (Kael, 1985, para. 1). Wide shots depict green fields drenched in sunlight surrounding whitewashed farm buildings in the distance — buildings fashioned by the film crew to recreate an Amish homestead (see *Figure 9*). This imagery is repeated in the film as Book and the Lapp family travel to a neighboring farm for a barn raising, an Amish celebration of community and hard work.

Figure 9. The Lapp farm represents the quintessential agrarian locale (Feldman & Weir, 1985).

Phil Alden Robinson's *Field of Dreams* (1989)

In 1989, the "mortgage melodrama" genre added another film to its ranks: *Field of Dreams* (Gordon, Gordon, & Robinson, 1989). The movie was filmed largely in farming towns Dubuque and Dyersville, Iowa ("*Field of Dreams*," n.d.); the titular field became a major tourist attraction after the film was released. Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner), a Berkeley graduate and lifelong baseball fanatic, hears a voice whisper from his Iowa cornfield: "If you build it, he will come." One of cinema's most famous lines sets off a series of events: Ray plows under several acres of valuable cropland and builds a baseball diamond, travels to Boston in search of a reclusive novelist named Terence Mann (James Earl Jones), and road-trips with Terence to a small Minnesota town in search of a former ball player named Moonlight Graham. Back at home, Ray's wife Annie (Amy Madigan) deals with her brother (Timothy Busfield), who wants to buy the farm before the property falls into foreclosure.

As a narrative work, *Field of Dreams* is a literal pastoral fantasy, combining imagery associated with agriculture with fantastical themes: ghosts, precognition, and time travel. In her review of the film, *New York Times* critic Caryn James (1989) wrote: "Kevin Costner, as an Iowa farmer named Ray Kinsella, looks across his cornfield and sees a vision that glimmers like a desert mirage" (para. 1). The farm, shot by cinematographer John Lindley ("*Field of Dreams*," n.d.), itself fulfills the pastoral fantasy of most filmmakers: In the midst of the fertile fields, the Kinsellas' white farmhouse and neatly painted barns and outbuildings stand as monuments to the small-farm idyll memorialized for decades (see *Figure 10*). To punctuate the film's finale, Robinson affords Shoeless Joe Jackson (Ray Liotta) and Ray the film's second-most famous piece of dialogue, a telling metaphor for the grandeur of agrarian life:

> Joe: Hey, is this heaven?
> Ray: No, it's Iowa.

Figure 10. Working in his fields at twilight, Ray Kinsella envisions the field he will build. This mirage contributes to the fantastical nature of the film (Gordon, Gordon, & Robinson, 1989).

Discussion

Based on the results of the Kellogg study (Kellogg Foundation, 2002), Americans' perceptions of agriculture and rural life continue to be dominated by romanticized visual tropes associated with the pastoral fantasy. These perceptions, based on recycled and often-sanitized depictions of events, constitute our cultural memory of food and fiber production and the agrarian lifestyle. The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the visual elements of well-known films that support the pastoral fantasy and, in doing so, link American cinema to its propagation.

Between 1950 and 1980, portrayals of agriculture tended to idealize food and fiber production and the people involved in the process. Films such as *Oklahoma!*, *Giant*, and *East of Eden* took advantage of new cinema technologies and formats to increase the visual scale of agriculture-centered texts to epic proportions. By the early 1980s, contentious agriculture policies, coupled with the gradual decline of farm numbers, brought the problems facing agriculturalists to the forefront, resulting in the spate of foreclosure-centered agricultural melodramas that endeavored — some more successfully than others — to more realistically depict the struggles of the American farmer.

Of the nine texts examined in this study, only two — *Giant* and *Country* — subvert the idyllic representation of the pastoral wonderland described in the Kellogg report (Kellogg Foundation, 2002) and instead show rural, agrarian America in less-than-stellar form. *Giant*, filmed on location in West Texas, truthfully illustrates the bleached-out prairies of Reata in high summer, a stark contrast to the more idealized agrarian landscapes shown early in the film. *Country*, on the other hand, provides the audience a realistic, almost documentary depiction of the Midwest in fall and winter. The land is bare from harvest, the skies gray and overcast, and the muddy disorder that follows a snowfall is presented without embellishment.

Despite some attempts at realism, most of the films produced in this time span aspire to present agricultural life according to the principles of the pastoral fantasy as described by the Kellogg Foundation researchers: small, storybook family farms replete with crop fields and pastures; rolling hills dotted with acres of forest and crisscrossed by dirt roads. The symbolism of rural America constitutes a typology of visual language related to traditional values. The aforementioned rolling hills and pastures represent the viability and fertility of agrarian land; the verdant shades associated with those landscapes also connote the economic prosperity associated with such fruitful country. The dirt roads, favored by a majority of cinematographers, seem to signify the rugged individualism of the traditional family farmer, set apart both geographically and dispositionally from conventional society.

The continuous and consistent repetition of these visual tropes has, over time, cemented them in American cultural memory. Though it cannot be conclusively stated that film representations of this rural archetype are solely responsible for the propagation of the pastoral fantasy, the abundance of such imagery in the films studied and their parallels to the findings of the Kellogg researchers suggest that media texts have played a key role in the cultural acceptance of this paradigm.

Entertainment media remain an understudied entity within agricultural communications scholarship: To date, only Ruth, Lundy, and Park's (2005) analysis of reality program *The Simple Life* and Holt and Cartmell's (2013) study of the documentary *Food, Inc.* populate the canon of entertainment-media research. This study, therefore, represents a preliminary attempt to delineate the sociocultural influence of entertainment media portrayals of food and fiber production across time. Based on the responses of Kellogg study participants, the agrarian mythos retains a powerful sway on society's perceptions of rural America, and further research is needed to better understand the channels through which idealized depictions are disseminated, the immediate impacts of exposure to these representations, and how agricultural communicators and other industry professionals can counteract those potential audience effects.

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Research

How Students Develop Skill and Identity in an Agricultural Communications Writing Course

Holli R. Leggette and Holly Jarvis

Abstract

Writing is more than a means of communication. It is one way students can gain knowledge and develop their personal and professional identity. The purpose of this study was to understand students' perspectives on how they developed skill and identity as writers in an agricultural communications writing course. Fifteen students wrote one-page student reflections about their experience in Agricultural Media Writing I. The reflections were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis, which was guided by the seven vectors identified in Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of education and identity. After analyzing the one-page reflections, the data fit vectors one, two, three, four, five, and six but did not fit vector seven. College students in this course developed competence, the ability to manage their emotions, a balance between autonomy and independence, intimate relationships, professional identity, and purpose. Each student's reflections demonstrated growth in these areas as a direct result of participating in the course. Students changed as writers because of the course, identified several andragogical techniques that enabled their success in the course, and grew in their professional identities as writers. Additionally, students mastered content and built a toolbox full of writing tools they can use as they progress through their education and become professionals. Extending the education and identity theory into writing education models and writing competency models would provide a unique aspect of the role students' self-perceived identity plays in their abilities to produce text.

Key Words

Writing, writing-intensive course, education and identity

Introduction

Writing is more than a means of communication; it is a pathway to self-actualization, as claimed by Rohman and Wlecke (1964). They explained that "in writing a person is satisfying his [or her] basic needs for self-affirmation as well as the immediate practical needs for communication" (p. 10). Writing helps students "clarify thoughts and assumptions, hone analytical skills, and touch inner feelings" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 61).

Writing is a constructive process shaped and carried out in a complex environment guided by the attitudes and feelings of not only the writer but also the society and people who surround him or her (Flower, 1994). The conceptual model of writing expertise draws on the theory of discourse community, that writers become a part of a community and build on each other's ideas and developments (Beaufort, 2007). The discourse community establishes norms, values, beliefs, and environments specific to that community or shared with overlapping communities and defines and stabilizes boundaries relative to that particular community (Beaufort, 1999; Beaufort).

If students are intellectually competent, they can "construct meaning, using words, images, and theories" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 63). Chickering and Reisser explained that a part of college student maturation is becoming an effective oral and written communicator and developing a professional identity and purpose as part of their career training. In a 2005 study by Sitton, Cartmell, and Sargent, communications professionals agreed editing the work of others, writing with the appropriate style, and applying writing skills in a real-world situation were important communication proficiencies. However, Watson and Robertson (2011) found students valued working in teams but did not think editing others' work was an important skill. Students may not see the impact of society and community on effective communication and skill development. But, coming back to Chickering and Reisser's theory of education and identity, students can develop skills in listening, questioning, reflecting, and communicating if they are given opportunities to learn in an environment that encourages them to search for knowledge.

"The task of understanding student writers — digging down to uncover their fears, their blind spots, the bad habits acquired early in life — has always been difficult for teachers of writing at all grade levels" (Lingwall & Kuehn, 2013, p. 379). Providing students with an environment that encourages self-revelation and interpretation within a judgment-free classroom context is important in helping instructors and students discover and address their deficiencies (Lingwall & Kuehn). Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested college students need opportunities to exercise their skills within a supportive environment to move from being a dependent learner to an independent learner prepared for a successful career.

Nicol, Thomson, and Breslin (2014) argued students construct meaning as they provide feedback for their peers — "the catalyst for meaning construction is not an external input, rather it is an input generated directly by the students themselves as they engage in making critical judgements [*sic*]" (p. 118). Critical instructor-to-student and student-to-student feedback provides students with the opportunity to focus their learning by differentiating what they know and do not know (Chickering & Reisser).

"Writing pedagogy, then, no longer restricted itself to matters of convention but moved on to consider human encoders and decoders in an ever changing situational context" (Schiff, 2010, p. 163). Cohen (1981) stated good teaching included six dimensions, two of which were interaction and feedback. Students should have the opportunity to experiment with writing in a supportive yet challenging environment that encourages the generation of material before the final stages of the writing process (Vilardi, 1986). Furthermore, in 2006, Bok argued repeated opportunities to write and receive timely feedback from faculty members will help undergraduate students become more effective writers.

Schiff (2010) stated that "in-class writing assignments followed by immediate peer and instructor feedback were absolutely essential to effective college composition pedagogy" (p. 162). Schiff claimed he assigns the most important assignments as in-class assignments, which is supported in research by Barcelow-Hill and Rowan (1984). During in-class assignments, Schiff interacted with students to provide immediate feedback because it is better to address a problem as it occurs than after it has occurred. According to Beach and Friedrich (2006), faculty members' feedback during the writing composition process is instrumental in how and to what extent students revise their writing assignments. Schiff further explained that, if a student's work is not well received in class, the stigma of substandard writing will carry into the student's writing done away from the formal classroom. Faculty members must be careful, therefore, not to project their persona as a lens when providing students feedback on their writing assignments because students could interrupt the feedback as negative (Hyland, 1998; Taylor, 2002).

Additionally, Schunk and Swartz (1993) argued writing process goals and progress feedback improved writing strategy, skill, and self-efficacy. Aligning process goals with progress feedback has more of an effect on self-efficacy and competence than incorporating the two independent of each other (Schunk & Swartz). Self-efficacy for writing is an individual's beliefs that he or she can produce text (Schunk & Swartz). According to Schunk and Swartz, if students felt competent in their writing, they were more likely to write and invest resources in their writing. Pajares and Valiante (2006) noted self-efficacy is a foundation for classroom achievement and argued students' beliefs in their abilities give them the motivation to be persistent and reach their goals. Further, students' confidence in their ability to complete a writing assignment is impacted by their hesitancy to write and apprehension of writing (Pajares & Valiante).

Conceptual Framework

Chickering and Reisser's theory of education and identity (1993) "present[s] a comprehensive picture of psychosocial development during the college years" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 67). Students move through seven vectors of identity development toward individualization, sometimes simultaneously or at different times and rates. "Vectors do build on each other, leading to greater complexity, stability, and integration as the issues related to each one are addressed" (Evans et al., pp. 66–67).

Developing competence, first vector, is a pitchfork of competence that has three tines: intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Intellectual competence is "skill in using one's mind," which includes "mastering content … [and] building a repertoire of skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize" (p. 45). Whereas, physical and manual competence includes athletic achievement, competitiveness, and development of strength, fitness, and self-discipline (Chickering & Reisser), interpersonal competence is two-fold — development of listening, cooperating, and communicating skills and development of positive contribution to complex relationships and group functions (Chickering & Reisser). Developing competence is "people's assessment of their capabilities" (p. 53), which is subjective (Chickering & Reisser). Competence is a stem of the confidence tree — confidence in the self and believing one has the physical and mental power to master tasks (Chickering & Reisser), such as writing for media outlets and Associated Press (AP) style.

Managing emotions is the second vector where students learn how to recognize, accept, and express emotions; release tension and frustration before it impacts other areas of their lives (Chickering & Reisser, 1993); and "act on feelings in a responsible manner" (Evan et al., 2010, p. 67). Inevitably, students experience multiple types and levels of emotions — from depression and anger to optimism and inspiration (Chickering & Reisser). These emotions, if not handled properly and in a timely manner, can cause students to become overwhelmed.

Students experience vector three when they become self-sufficient and move through autonomy toward interdependence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Here, students develop a sense of self-direction and mobility and the ability to solve problems (Evans et al., 2010). They learn to take responsibility for their goals and the consequences that follow their decisions (Chickering & Reisser). Students who are interdependent know when to give and when to take. They learn to be emotionally independent (free from constant feedback) and instrumentally independent (thinking critically and independently) before recognizing and accepting their interdependence (Chickering & Reisser).

In vector four, students develop mature interpersonal relationships, which include "tolerance and appreciation of differences [and] capacity for intimacy" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). Students develop the ability to choose and nurture strong, healthy relationships that can endure hardships.

They learn to be less dependent and dominant in their relationships and to be more equal through sharing, accepting differences, and appreciating assets (Chickering & Reisser).

Vector five, establishing identity, is dependent on the aforementioned vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans et al., 2010). "It leads to clarity and stability and a feeling of warmth for this core self as capable, familiar, worthwhile" (Chickering & Reisser, p. 50). Students establish identity through comfort with body, appearance, gender, and sexual orientation; sense of their social and cultural heritage and their ability to respond to feedback from those they deem as important; clarification of themselves through their role in society; and personal acceptance, esteem, stability, and integration (Chickering & Reisser).

Developing purpose, vector six, is "developing clear vocational goals, making meaningful commitments to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong interpersonal commitments" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 69). Students learn to assess their abilities, interests, and options; set goals and develop action plans before making decisions based on those goals and action plans; and persevere despite obstacles (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Learning to balance family, lifestyle, and intimate relationships with vocational interests is a lesson in developing purpose (Chickering & Reisser).

Developing integrity, which is related to establishing identity and developing purpose, has "three sequential but overlapping stages" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 51) — humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. As students progress through college, they develop a more relative, humanistic values system that balances their interests with the interests of others (Chickering & Reisser; Evans et al., 2010). To personalize values and develop core beliefs, students examine others' values and beliefs and affirm their beliefs while learning to acknowledge and respect the beliefs of others (Chickering & Reisser; Evans et al.). Students develop congruence between their behavior and values after personalizing their beliefs.

In addition to the seven vectors, Chickering and Reisser (1993) acknowledged the environment plays an important role in students' identity formation. Students' identity formation process is nurtured by an environment that gives them opportunities to play different roles, have a choice, gain achievement, be free from anxiety, and have time to reflect on experience (Knefelkamp, Widisk, & Parker, 1978). Chickering and Reisser added students' identity formation environments should include "interaction with diverse individuals and ideas," "receiving feedback and making objective self-assessments," and "involvement in activities that foster self-esteem and understanding of one's social and cultural heritage" (p. 207).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) added *Education and Identity* included seven environmental influences: institutional objectives, institutional size, student-faculty relationships, curriculum, teaching, friendships and student communities, and student development programs and services. Chickering and Reisser stated accessibility, authenticity, student communication, and student knowledge were components of student-faculty relationships. Evans et al. (2010) summarized Chickering and Reisser and stated students must perceive their faculty members as being real people who have interest in the lives of students and want to communicate with them. Likewise, curriculum should recognize differences among individuals and help students understand what they are learning and why they are learning it (Evans et al.). The teaching influence should include active learning, interaction with students, timely feedback, high expectations, and an understanding and appreciation of student diversity (Evans et al.). Chickering and Reisser's argument solidifies the need for college instructors to be an active and influential part of the educational process.

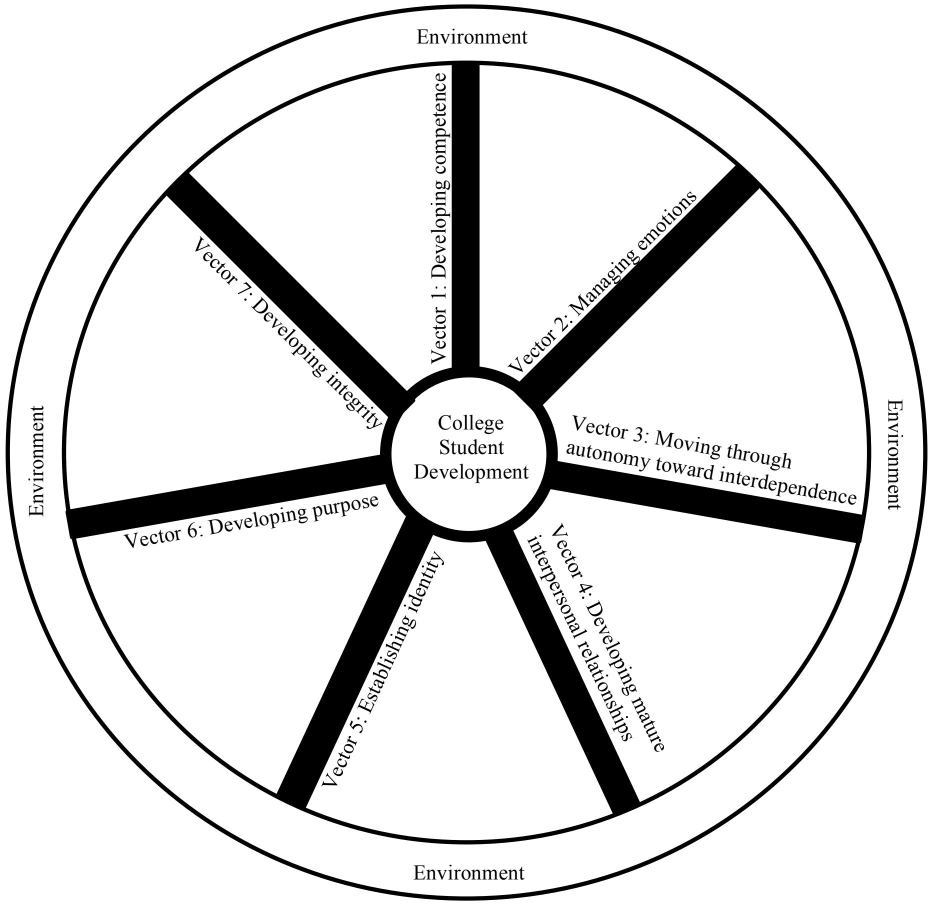

Figure 1. Depicting Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of education and identity as a wagon wheel. College student development is the hub supported by the seven vectors and secured by the environment.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand students' perspectives on how they developed skill and identity as writers in an agricultural communications writing course. Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do students develop relationships, manage emotions and move toward interdependence in an agricultural communications writing course?

RQ2: What writing instructional techniques made the most difference in competency growth from the students' perspective?

RQ3: How does an agricultural communications writing course help students develop their professional identity and purpose as writers?

Context of the Study

Agricultural Media Writing I is an undergraduate agricultural communications writing course and the first of two writing courses Texas A&M University agricultural communications and journalism majors and minors are required to complete. It is designed for the beginning writer. Students learn the basics of journalistic writing — news gathering, writing, editing, *Associated Press Stylebook*, and media ethics and law. Course content includes news identification, audience analysis, basic news writing forms (e.g., inverted pyramid), attribution, and interviewing. Students are exposed to writing for multiple types of news media: print, broadcast, and online. After completing the course, students should have the skills to identify and gather news from various stakeholder audiences, organize information into an appropriate form for communication media, use a writing style consistent with the audience and medium, and write clear, accurate and engaging copy targeted at a specific audience and medium. The course is taught each fall, spring, and summer semester.

The summer 2012 semester was a 10-week course that met four days a week for an hour and 35 minutes each day. As part of the course, students were asked to complete a writing assignment at least three days a week to help them to develop consistently as a writer. The instructor lectured about a topic and provided the students with a lab assignment related to the lecture. For example, the instructor lectured about attribution and gave the students a list of facts and quotes they attributed using journalism techniques. While the students were completing the lab assignments, the instructor walked through the classroom and provided assistance as needed. Students received both oral and written feedback on each lab assignment. Also, the students were asked to complete four AP style quizzes each week. Each paper-based quiz had 10 to 20 sentences with AP style mistakes, and the students were expected to correct those mistakes.

Additionally, the students were asked to complete four major assignments: leads, covering a news conference/speaker, single-source story, and multiple-source story. The lead assignment was completed in lab, and the students were not given the chance to rewrite because they had produced a similar lab assignment during the previous class period. The second major assignment was completed outside of class, but the students listened to the speaker as part of an in-class presentation. Students were required to write a 1.5- to 2-page story highlighting the most important information from the speech. The students did not have an opportunity to rewrite this assignment.

Further, the third major assignment was completed based on a topic of the student's choice. Students were required to write a single-source story approximately 1 to 1.5 pages and provide a source sheet with information about their interviewee. They worked on this assignment in lab and received peer reviews before submitting the final draft. The fourth major assignment was completed based on a topic of the student's choice, also. Students were required to write a multiple-source story that included two personal interviews and one printed source. The story was 2 to 2.5 pages in length and written for publication in the local newspaper. The students worked on the assignment in lab, were required to have at least two peers review their story, attended a mandatory instructor/student meeting, and rewrote the story if desired.

During the course, the instructor worked to create a relationship with the students that was authentic, fostering, and encouraging. The classroom environment was an open forum for communication about writing and course assignments and curriculum. Students were able to communicate with their peers and instructor as needed during the course meeting time. Additionally, students were able to have freedom to choose their writing topics and tailor their curriculum to their needs by choosing to participate and engage themselves in various levels of classroom interaction. Students were required to complete peer reviews on at least one assignment but were not forced to interact with their instructor or peers beyond that. However, each student chose to interact on a weekly, if not daily, basis.

During each class meeting, the instructor provided students with ongoing formative feedback in an individual and group setting. The instructor provided formative feedback on each section of the writing assignment and summative feedback at the end of each assignment. Students received timely instructor feedback on each assignment. The students showed evidence of their goals to meet the instructor's high expectations when they discussed the rigor of the course and how difficult it was to earn an A in the course. Students were encouraged to learn from their mistakes and to develop as writers in a challenging learning environment.

Method

This qualitative study explored how students developed skill and identity as writers in an agricultural communications writing course. The data were not collected based on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of education and identity, but after further examination, the data fit six of the seven vectors. The goal of this content analysis was to extend the application of writing instruction theory in light of education and identity. Patton (2002) termed this process analytic induction and promoted it for examining phenomena in light of a widely accepted theory. The population for this qualitative study was undergraduates students enrolled in *Agricultural Media Writing I* at Texas A&M University during the summer 2012 semester (*N* = 15). The students were mostly female upper-class students who were agricultural communications and journalism majors. All of the students had completed more than one course in the major, and most had completed more than four courses in the major (see Table 1).

Table 1
Student Demographics and TAMU Agricultural Communications Courses Taken

	Students (*N* = 15)
Gender	
Male	3
Female	12
Classification	
U3 (completion of 60 to 94 hours)	9
U4 (completion of 95+ hours)	6
Major	
Agricultural Communications and Journalism	12
Other than Agricultural Communications and Journalism	3
Courses Taken	
Introduction to Agricultural Communications	10
Theory and Practice of Agricultural Publishing	3
Theory and Practice of Agricultural Public Relations	9
Electronic Media Production in Agricultural Communications	4
Workshop in Agricultural Communications and Journalism	2
Communicating Agricultural Information to the Public	2
Agricultural Public Relations Methods	1

Data for this study were one-page student reflections the instructor kept for course evaluation purposes. Additionally, observations were conducted during class time. At the end of the semester, students were asked to reflect on their experiences in *Agricultural Media Writing I* and complete a final one-page writing assignment with four questions.

1. Describe yourself as a writer before this class and now.
2. What class activities helped you the most (e.g., peer review, instructor feedback, AP style quizzes)?
3. At what point in the course did you begin to see writing differently?
4. How has this course helped develop your idea of writing as a profession?

Each participant was assigned a random two-digit number identifier from one to 15. Data was unitized, as each unit was assigned a separate, sequential code (For example, the ninth unit of participant two would be coded as 02:09.). Researchers performed a content analysis of the reflection data. Content analysis is "a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 472). The seven vectors of college student development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) were used as a guide for data analysis. Researchers discussed the data throughout the analysis and reviewed data three times to ensure it had been coded correctly (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation was achieved by using multiple methods for data collection, including observation, student reflections, and Chickering and Reisser's theory of education and identity. To achieve transferability, thick description was used in the results to allow readers to make inferences about the applicability of this study to their own context. As data was discussed throughout data analysis, researchers kept an audit trail, a methodological journal, and peer debriefing memos for dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

College students in this course developed competence, the ability to manage their emotions, a balance between autonomy and independence, intimate relationships, professional identity, and purpose. Further, each student's reflections demonstrated growth in these areas as a direct result of participating in the course.

Research Question 1

Students who participated in this study said they developed relationships, managed emotions, and moved toward interdependence as part of the agricultural communications writing course. Students claimed they liked the close relationships they developed with their instructor and peers and reported the class size was important to the development of these relationships and their learning. "I've never had a class this small before, and the small-class atmosphere was great for learning how to write for the media" (9.07). Small class size promoted "interaction (communication) between the students and teacher," which "was my favorite part" (9.07). Further, "This has been one of my favorite classes I have taken my entire college career … because I have had more of a personal relationship with my teacher and I have had lots of help and encouragement from my peers" (10.05).

Students also had to manage their emotions to meet the challenges of the course. At the beginning of the course, students were "worried about taking writing courses" (5.04). One student reported, "Before I [be]came an agricultural communications and journalism major I hated to write. I always preferred to take math courses or sciences courses because I could study for the exams" (5.01). However, the data indicated the students shifted their feelings throughout the course. "I enjoyed

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taking this class. I did not have a positive outlook on it in the beginning, but my perception changed quickly" (13.09).

Additionally, students reported they did not like the writing activities, but they reflected positively on the activities and saw several changes in their writing throughout the course. "Honestly, the class activities that assisted me the best would have to be the ones that I disliked the most, and those were the actual major writing assignments. Though I did not like them, they forced me to deal with my problem with writing" (14.04). Another student wrote, "The AP style tests that we took were very tedious. Honestly, they were my least favorite part of the class but probably the most helpful" (6.05). Students saw the benefit of each assignment, and over time, students reported experiencing a change in their feelings about the course. "After the first couple of assignments, I saw myself begin to improve. This really helped me stay focused throughout the summer and work hard at increasing my knowledge of how to write well" (11.09).

As students moved toward interdependence, they claimed an increased self-knowledge of their goals in their professions. "I found that being objective is difficult, but that is what news writing is all about. I know that I am not a good writer, but I am willing to work" (11.02-03). Students reflected that this self-knowledge helped them understand what it took to be a writer. "After taking this course I have gained confidence in my writing skills, and would say I am getting closer to my goal of being a great writer" (5.11). One student reported that her "biggest strength is telling a story" but also feeling "as though I have a good amount of things to learn going ahead with my future before I can be the writer I want to be" (12.03).

Students not only reported they changed in their motivation to write but also reported shifts in how they approached writing assignments. "Whether it was a test or a paper, I always just went through it once and turned it in. I threw caution to the wind and whatever I got was what I got. This class has helped me to see the benefits of rewriting, editing, and reevaluating your work before your final submission" (13.06).

Furthermore, students noted the class helped them plan for their own writing success, a part of developing autonomy (the third vector). "I wrote the last assignment the easiest. Though I waited to the last minute possible to write my paper, the actual time I spent writing it was shorter than usual even though the length requirement was longer" (14.07). Another student reported enjoying problem solving in class: "The AP style quizzes I actually enjoyed; call me a nerd but I enjoyed fixing the sentences. I felt like Sherlock Holmes finding the problem to solve the sentence" (4.05).

Research Question 2

Students noted they realized their skills developed as the course progressed. One student reflected that it was "towards the middle … when writing really started to look differently, and I began to differentiate the styles and know in what situations the different styles were needed" (12.07). Without this mental shift, "I would have probably written a news story the same way I did everything else" (2.07-8). Another student reflected, "I didn't realize how much I would have to change my style of writing but I can [now]" (3.02).

Furthermore, students experienced challenges with some of the skills presented in the class. "When I got into this class, it really challenged me. ... I struggled a lot with attribution and shortening what I would usually elaborate on" (6.02-03). Student seven elaborated: "To make it even more challenging, I was asked to write succinctly in a way that was so interesting that a reader would be compelled to read more" (7.06). Not only were audience, condensation of information and attribution challenging, so was "finding credible sources" (15.04). One student noted this course was the beginning of a longer process of learning how to be a writer. "I am still battling with keeping the old styles out of my writing, but I feel as though it will be a process that will take more time than a single semester" (12.07).

To combat the challenges in the course, students identified the techniques (class discussion and AP style quizzes) that helped them develop competence as writers. Students claimed the AP style quizzes were difficult but helpful even though they took students several hours outside of class to complete. "Being able to talk about our papers and discuss different scenarios helped me understand the material better, as well as helped me remember what I did wrong so that I would not make the same mistake again. Even though the AP quizzes were time consuming, I feel that they were helpful in putting the *AP Stylebook* to use and gave me different types of sentences that I could practice on" (2.04-5). Chickering and Reisser (1993) claimed persisting despite obstacles was a part of students' ability to develop purpose (vector six). The attention to detail the students gained while completing the AP style quizzes and discussing assignments is something they can transfer to their careers.

By developing writing competency, students began to enjoy writing and see their role as writers differently. "This course opened my eyes to a different writing world that I have learned to understand and enjoy" (2.07-8). Student eight expanded on developing competence and said "After taking this class, even though I know I could have written a news article before and it would have been OK, I am comfortable with saying that I would do a really good job now" (8.02). Not all students, however, reported being drawn to media writing as a career but said they "can appreciate this style of writing more [and] feel more confident as a writer in many ways after taking this course" (3.02).

During and after the course, students noted they had a newfound respect for journalism and saw the need for writing without extraneous material. Students "learned to like more of the journalistic side of writing" (6.02-3) and were challenged by the course. Most recognized this was the beginning of a larger journey to becoming a writer and learned to shift their thinking to a new style.

Research Question 3

Students reflected positively on the opportunity to develop their sense of writing in relation to their personal identity, and some reported developing a clear sense of purpose in their lives as a result of the class. Two students reported feeling no desire to become writers, but that they were more "comfortable with communicating" (14.09) in written form and more "prepared to enter the writing profession" (12.08) after the course. Although these two students acknowledged that they had no desire to "end up in a writing profession" (12.08), they believed that writing was "highly important in any field one goes into" (14.09).

Other students, however, reported feeling more drawn to writing professions and prepared for a writing career after the course. "I have enjoyed writing as a journalist, and I definitely feel that I have found the right major for me" (1.08). One student noted a change in her career aspirations: "I haven't ever really considered being a journalist but learning more about this has made it a lot more interesting and appealing (10.02). … I have thought more about the writing aspect of my future job and how being a good journalist will help me succeed" (10.7-8). Another student described the career potential she found through this course — "What I do want to do is be a voice for those who need someone to speak for them. Maybe with more experience in media writing I will gain the confidence to be a hard news reporter" (7.09).

Additionally, establishing identity as a professional is an important part of college student development, and students reported the course helped develop their perceptions of the writing field. One student compared the course to a real-world writing experience: "It felt like a real life situation where you would have an editor to help you improve your writing prior to the deadline. Good editors make good writers, and being able to receive feedback instead of just a number grade helps a student to actually know what areas they need to improve on rather just guessing and hoping they get it right" (13.04). Another student described that "being able to ask questions and talk about why we do things the way we do" (9.08) was a positive experience of being in this writing class. He went on to describe the contrast of this course experience with others in different fields: "That's why math sucks. The 'it's-right-because-I-said-so' mentality never sat well with me" (9.08).

Students noted class size was important in their development as writers because, often times, classes are too large for student success and nurture. The small class size allowed students the time to respond to peer and instructor feedback, which students noted helped change their writing. "The activities that helped me the most were peer review and instructor feedback" (3.03). Students noted instructor feedback was important because "it reassures the students that they are on the right path [and] they have the opportunities to ask questions and receive some insight on how to improve their paper" (4.06).

Furthermore, students attributed their successes to several different techniques used in the course. One student said "Practice, practice, practice!" (7.03) was the key to her success. Others noted the instructor's "accessibility was very helpful to us all" (1.03-4). Peer feedback was identified as the single biggest contributor to student success in the course. "The best thing that we did in my opinion was when we had time during class to write a story on a certain topic and then had time to peer review to make changes" (12.04). Peer feedback allowed students to respond to others in a constructive context so that "a lot of the careless mistakes would be caught before turning in the paper" (12.04-05).

As a result of the course, students said they experienced changes in their writing habits during the course. Students claimed they gained writing skills, ability to manage emotions, competence to plan for success, close peer relationships, opportunity to respond to the feedback of those peers, and clarity in personal identity and professional goals.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Students in the summer 2012 *Agricultural Media Writing I* course progressed in their writing skill and self-perception as writers. Just as Rohman and Wlecke found in 1964, writing was more than communication for these students — it was a way for them to develop their identity and self-concept. Students changed as writers because of the course, and they identified several andragogical techniques used in the course that enabled their success. Also, based on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) description of professional identity in their theory of education and identity, students grew in their professional identities as writers.

Promotion of a writing-friendly learning environment helps students change to have more competence and confidence in their writing skills. Students saw their successes and allowed that to feed changes in their emotional outlook. Human beings will often ignore opportunities and challenges outside of their comfort zones because of the fear to fail. Ignoring a skill such as writing could lead to lack of career opportunities. Therefore, students were required to write regularly to face their fears and problems with writing, which Chickering and Reisser described "developing new frames of reference" (p. 45) as important in vector one. Writing regularly helped students work through their problems and gain confidence in themselves and their abilities.

Because students were asked to complete assignments in steps, they were required to take the time to attend to each step and make revisions before moving on. Students are accustomed to sitting down, writing a paper, and turning the paper in without reviewing, revising, or editing their final product. This course gave students the opportunity to attend to mistakes and errors and the facilitated time to revise and edit the final product. Students noted the revising and editing stages helped them change as writers and become more confident and competent in their writing ability.

Additionally, students mastered content and built a toolbox full of writing tools they can use as they progress through their education and become professionals, which was noted as a piece of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector one and five. This course helped students develop a sense of purpose in their lives and identify goals. Intimate peer and instructor relationships (vector four) were critical to students' successes and their development of purpose in the writing professions. Students grew in their professional identities as writers and developed an appreciation for media writing as they developed their skills. Students were able to identify their goals and move toward them (vector six), recognizing they were not fully there yet when it came to being a professional writer. Although many of them will never have a journalism career, they now understand the importance of learning how to present clear, factual information in a succinct way and construct meaning using feedback, which Nicol, Thomson, and Breslin (2014) argued was a reason feedback should be included in higher education.

Students appreciated the opportunity to interact with and learn from their peers on a daily basis. Chickering and Reisser said the development of learning how to receive feedback from others is important to interpersonal competence — a key component in vector one and vector five. Peer review and feedback were the best techniques used in the course because the feedback increased their skill level and helped them not make the same mistake again. The feedback students received in the course provided them with opportunities to become better writers without sacrificing their grades. Just as Schiff stated in 2010, catching a mistake before it becomes a determinant to the student is important in the educational process. Time is limited, but continuous feedback should not be the first to go for the sake of time.

Just as Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted, environment played a key role in students' successes as they developed into media writers. Making sure large lectures are divided into smaller lab sections helps with the intimacy of the writing environment and the development of mature relationships, Chickering and Reisser's fourth vector. Because this was a small summer class (15 students), one should question if the results would be the same in a large class format. Therefore, this study should be replicated in a larger class using regular feedback from the instructor and peers to see if the class size makes a difference in how students change and develop their professional identifies as writers.

The course was not explicitly designed to collect data based on Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of education and identity, but researchers saw the relationship between Chickering and Reisser's theory and writing education during the preliminary review of the data. Therefore, Vector Seven: Developing Integrity was not intentionally excluded, but none of the data indicated a relationship with the seventh vector. Extending the education and identity theory into writing education models and writing competency models would provide a unique aspect of the role students' development of identity plays in their ability to produce text.

Implications

Communications professionals identified editing, adhering to style, and applying writing skills as important to career training (Sitton, Cartmell, & Sargent, 2005). Although, undergraduates do not see those things in the same way (Lingwall & Kuehn, 2013), students need writing experiences that prepare them for the realities of communications careers. In this course, students progressed in

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writing skills through peer and instructor feedback, skill quizzes, and access to the instructor. Agricultural communications writing instructors must consider these elements when designing writing courses to help students develop an appreciation for the ways communications professionals view their job skills.

College students do not experience their courses in a vacuum. They are developing as individuals throughout their college experience. Agricultural communications writing instructors should consider students' overall development as people and as professionals by implementing strategies presented in this research. Students are open to forming new relationships, handling their emotions in ways that are more sophisticated, and becoming more interdependent with their peers. They are looking for opportunities to find their purpose and act in a way that matches that purpose, including honing skills they value and that help them accomplish their purpose (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Using peer and instructor feedback, completing skill quizzes, creating a safe environment, and having an instructor who is accessible helps agricultural communications students move forward in development of their personal and professional capabilities.

Undeniably, just as Rohman and Wlecke claimed in 1964, writing is more than a means of communication. It is a pathway to agricultural communications students understanding themselves and their agricultural community. It is one way students can gain knowledge and develop their personal and professional identity.

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Research

Evaluating Food Labels and Food Messages: An Experimental Study of the Impact of Message Format and Product Type on Evaluations of Magazine Food Advertisements

Yongick Jeong and Lisa K. Lundy

Abstract

This study looked at gain/loss messages in magazine advertisements across three different food products – a fresh, plant-based product (bananas), a processed, plant-based product (potato chips), and a processed, animal-based product (milk). These food products were all unfamiliar brands for the study participants. Using a 2 (gain vs. loss frame) X 3 (organic, non-GMO, and antibiotics free products) mixed-repeated-measures design, this study examines how message format and product type influenced the effectiveness of food labels in magazine food advertisements. Results indicate product type and food labels were more influential than message format (gain/loss frame). Overall, participants viewed organic foods more favorably than non-GMO or antibiotics free foods. Overall, the effect of the gain/loss frames was eclipsed by the effect of the product type and food labels. Participants indicated greater recall for the organic (bananas) message than they did for the antibiotic-free (milk) or GMO (potato chips) messages. The recall also was greater for the food labels found in the organic message. It's important for food marketers to consider gain/loss frames may be more/less effective depending on the type of food product.

Key Words

Food labels, genetically modified organisms, organic, advertising

Introduction

Americans spend roughly 15 percent of their household income on food (Crawford, Church, & Rippy, 2012). Studies show consumers are increasingly concerned about food safety, particularly with regard to genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the use of antibiotics and hormones, and the application of pesticides (Brewer & Rojas, 2008). Marketers face a challenge as consumer attitudes toward food safety are ever-changing and food behaviors are not consistent (Brewer & Rojas, 2008).

Despite difficult economic conditions, more families than ever are buying organic products (Greene, 2012). Where organic foods used to be sold in natural food stores, they now occupy prime aisle and shelf space in big-box food retail stores. Organic sales in the U.S. approached $30 billion in 2010, up from approximately $6 billion in 2000. The majority of those sales come from fruits and vegetables (Rossman, 2013). According to the Organic Trade Association (2011), 78 percent of adults buy organic foods at least occasionally. As consumers have purchased more organic food products, retailers have offered more organic options and increased advertising for these new products (Campbell et al., 2013).

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) expresses a commitment to the growth and success of organic farming on its website, http://usda.gov. The USDA celebrated the tenth anniversary of the USDA Organic Seal in October 2012. The USDA defines organic agriculture as producing "products using methods that preserve the environment and avoid most synthetic materials, such as pesticides and antibiotics" (para. 2). The USDA's organic standards also specify guidelines for how farmers grow crops and raise livestock.

Consumers have an increasingly complex interest in the food they consume. Consumer interest in food goes beyond taste to include social and ethical attributes related to food production (Briggeman & Lusk, 2011; Unnevehr, Eales, Jensen, Lusk, McCluskey & Kinsey, 2010; Zander & Hamm, 2010). While requirements for organic certification vary globally, most organic foods are grown without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. Most also avoid antibiotics or growth hormones in production. The growing process does not typically involve the use of food additives or genetically modified organisms (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements [IFOAM], 2005; National Archives and Records Administration [NARA], 2010). Consumers interpret words like "sustainable agriculture" in different ways and often lack context and information to interpret such terms (Rumble et al., 2014). Researchers have demonstrated a farm-to-table knowledge gap wherein consumers talk about hormones, antibiotics and steroids as important factors in their food decision-making all the while demonstrating a lack of understanding of these terms (Rumble & Buck, 2013). Consumer attitudes and behavior regarding genetically modified foods vary greatly across different cultures (McCluskey & Loureiro, 2003). Consumers often lack awareness about agricultural biotechnology or genetically modified foods (Lundy & Irani, 2004), but research reflects upward trends in adoption of genetically modified crops in the U.S. (Fernandez-Cornejo, 2013).

Food Labels

Regulation and prevalence of food labels varies globally. In the U.S., Congress passed the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act in 1990, providing for regulation of food labels (Hieke & Taylor, 2012). Nearly 25 years later, the effectiveness of food labels on consumer behavior is inconclusive (Hieke & Taylor, 2012). Consumers face labels like "organic," "fair trade," "locally grown," "GMO-free," and "antibiotics free" as they consider food purchases. Labels regarding fair trade and local products usually reflect a valuation of working conditions, labor practices, fair prices for farmers, and supporting family farms. Labels like "organic," "GMO-free," and "antibiotics free" usually reflect concerns related to natural resources or the environment, use of fertilizers, and other production practices (McCluskey & Loureiro, 2003).

Studies have uncovered a number of reasons given by consumers for purchasing organic food products: health (human and animal), taste preference, environmental concerns, and economic concerns (Abrams, Meyers & Irani, 2010; Miles & Frewer, 2001; Smith-Spangler et al., 2012). Hammitt (1990) asked organic-food consumers about risk factors that affected their purchase decisions. Consumers cited concerns about the effects of pesticide residues, growth stimulants, and fertilizers. Depending on circumstances, experience, or personal values, consumers may value any, none, or all of the above.

Most consumers choose (or do not choose) organic foods with little scientific understanding (Abrams, Meyers & Irani, 2010; Campbell, Mhlanga & Lesschaeve, 2013). The increase in organic spending coincides with experts questioning whether organic foods are safer or healthier and, in fact, offering evidence to the contrary (Smith-Spangler et al., 2012). While consumers often are skeptical of labels like "all-natural," they do report selecting products to avoid perceived risks.

Driven by increasing consumer demand for healthier, safer, and more environmentally friendly food products, the use of food labeling has become increasingly important in recent years. The use of credible labels allows firms to signal quality or the presence of specific desirable attributes and in so doing to create the potential for premiums based on this signal (McCluskey & Loureiro, 2003).

Abrams, Meyers, and Irani (2010) found "Participants also revealed that they do not understand why or how particular additives in meat are bad for them, but when marketing makes claims about not having additives, they are more inclined to buy that product or favor food products with the 'no' labeling theme" (p. 371). The relationship between layman's understanding of risk/health concern and expert information is well-researched in the field of risk analysis (Wynne, 1987).

Although overlap certainly exists in foods that are organic, non-GMO, and antibiotic-free, consumers perceive these labels differently. Anderson, Wachenheim, and Lesch (2006) found consumers in their study perceived organic foods as healthier, safer, and more environmentally sound than traditional food and foods with GMO ingredients. Consumers identified risks to society as a greater threat than personal risks in regards to GMO foods, pointing to unknown aggregate risks they perceived as associated with GMOs (Anderson, Wachenheim, & Lesch, 2006). Consumers also indicated the "use of biotechnology to enhance plants was much more favorable than its use in animals, consistent with existing literature" (Anderson, Wachenheim, & Lesch, 2006, p. 192).

While various researchers have examined consumer attitudes toward organic and environmentally sustainable food production, the only consistent variable associated with purchase of organic food products is the attainment of higher education (Oberholtzer, 2009; Pelletier, Laska, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2013; Zepeda & Li, 2007).

Gain and Loss Message Framing

Framing involves the ways information is packaged and organized (Simon & Xenos, 2000). The way information is framed is often the way people come to understand an issue. Consumers often make up for deficits in scientific understanding by relying on familiar cognitive frames as shortcuts. "Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Resse, Gandy, & Grant, 2001, p. 11).

Gain/loss frames are common in health communication and are rooted in prospect theory. According to prospect theory, people evaluate information regarding uncertain alternatives in relation to either potential gains or potential losses. Prospect theory originated with the study of behavioral economics (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) but has been widely applied. This theory posits people evaluate decisions based on perceived value of losses and gains responding to message framing. According to Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin, and Salovey (2006), "People will act to avoid risks when considering the potential gains afforded by a decision (they are risk averse in their preferences) but are willing to take risks when considering the potential losses afforded by their decision (they are risk seeking in their preferences) (p. S203).

According to prospect theory, gain frames usually emphasizes positive outcomes while loss frames usually emphasize negative outcomes, or the avoidance thereof (Dijkstra et al., 2011). In health communication, gain-framed messages emphasize positive outcomes associated with health behaviors while loss-framed messages emphasize negative outcomes or consequences that may be experienced if health behaviors are not adopted (Rothman & Salovey, 1997). The effectiveness of gain vs. loss frames is dependent upon whether the health behavior in question implores a prevention-oriented or a promotion-oriented mindset (Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin & Salovey, 2006). According to Rothman et al (2006):

> Gain-framed appeals should be more effective when promoting behaviors that elicit a promotion-oriented mindset, and loss-framed appeals should be more effective when promoting behaviors that elicit a prevention-oriented mindset. (p. S213)

In the case of food advertising promoting organic, non-GMO and antibiotic-free foods, it was unclear whether participants would approach the messages they read from a prevention-oriented or promotion-oriented mindset. As such, this study was exploratory in nature and the purpose was to describe the effects of gain- and loss-framed messages in magazine food advertisements. Magazine advertisements offer the space to communicate informative messages to consumers. In the case of unfamiliar products or product attributes (like organic, non-GMO, and antibiotic-free), these messages are especially important. This study asked the following research questions:

RQ1: How does message format (gain vs. loss frame) impact participant evaluation of food messages?
RQ2: How does product type (bananas, potato chips, and milk) impact participant evaluation of food messages?
RQ3: What interaction will product type (bananas, potato chips, and milk) have with message format (gain vs. loss) in regards to participant evaluation of food messages?

Methods

Participants

This study included 227 college students enrolled in selective mass communication courses at a southern university. Among the 227, this study eliminated seven data entries containing less than 80 percent of responses for key measures in the screening process. As a result, 220 were included in the data analysis. The participants' average age was 19.94, and 86.8 percent of them were female.

Identifying Organic Products

To select food products pertinent to research participants, this study reviewed relevant literatures and consulted peers and young adults who did not participate in the study. As a result, this study selected bananas, potato chips, and milk, foods generally available in general grocery stores and commonly used by the young adult population. These products represent three of the most popular food-related issues, such as organic, non-GMO, and antibiotics free, respectively. Based on this selection, these food items created the organic, non-GMO, and antibiotic free conditions, respectively.

Independent Variables

This study included two independent variables: message format and product type. First, this study looked at two message frame formats: gain message frame and loss message frame. Based on this classification, 112 research participants were randomly assigned into the gain message format (50.9%), and 108 were assigned to the loss message format (49.1%). Using the induction check scale used by Cho and Sands (2011), this study checked if participants differently perceived two messages formats. Participants' responses were assessed on three seven-point bipolar scales anchored by costs-benefits, losses-gains, and negative outcomes-positive outcomes. Then, index scores were formed by averaging the values of these items (Cronbach's α = .85 for organic condition, α = .88 for GMO condition, and α = .94 for antibiotics condition, respectively). The results showed research participants differently perceived two message frame formats in the three conditions. Second, considering the college popu-

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lation and their most common food-related concerns (e.g., organic, GMO, and antibiotics), this study selected bananas, potato chips, and milk for the respective issues.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable of this study is the effectiveness of food labels used in different food conditions. The dependent variable is measured in seven ways: recall, recognition, attitude, perceived value ($) of organic version, purchase intention, likelihood to pay more, and amount to pay more (%). To measure recall, participants were asked to provide any message context they could recall using open-ended questions. To measure recognition, participants were asked to select using a closed-ended questionnaire that included the food label used in the experiment as well as other types of food labels that were not used in the experiment. Next, attitude toward food labels was measured using the scale developed by Till and Shimp (1998), which uses seven descriptive adjective scales: good, favorable, positive, important, efficient, relevant, and necessary. Each scale ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Index scores were formed by averaging the values of these scales. Internal consistency test results showed these measures were reliable (Cronbach's α = .89 for the organic condition, α = .95 for the non-GMO condition, and α = .96 for an antibiotics-free condition).

To determine perceived value of organic products, participants were asked, "If the value of a non-organic product (e.g. regular banana/potato chips/milk) is $10.00, what do you think the value of an organic product will be?" using an open-ended question. For the purchase intention (PI), this study used the scale constructed by Yi (1990; 1993). Index scores were formed averaging the values of these items (Cronbach's α = .92 for the organic condition, α = .95 for the non-GMO condition, and α = .94 for an antibiotics-free condition). Finally, willingness to pay more was assessed in two ways: likelihood to pay more and amount to pay extra (%). Likelihood to pay more was measured by asking participants, "How likely are you to pay more for products with a(n) organic/non-GMO/Antibiotics free label than other products in the same product category?" using a seven-point Likert scale. For the amount to pay more for organic product versions, the following question was asked, "What percentage more would you be willing to pay for products with organic/non-GMO/Antibiotics free labels?"

Experimental Stimuli

This study created six one-page color print ads (two message formats in three food conditions) for experiments (see Figures 1 through 6). In this process, to prevent possible confounding influences from visual differences, all stimuli were created similarly. A single full-page photo was used for all six ads. A head copy and body copy messages appear in a lower center (banana ads), upper center (potato chips ads), and left-center (milk). A brand name was presented in the bottom right-hand corner of each ad. A food label was presented in the bottom left-hand side of each ad ("100% Organic" for banana ads in the organic condition, "Non-GMO Verified" for potato chips ads in the non-GMO condition, and "Free Antibiotics" for milk ads in the antibiotics free condition). In addition, to avoid the possible influence of participants' experience with a certain brand, bogus brands (Gold Acre for bananas, Rockies for potato chips, and Norman Farms for milk) were used.

Experiment Design

Each participant was given a booklet containing five print ads. Participants were asked to view the ads as they normally would any other magazine ad. Using Dahl, Sengupta, and Vohs' approach (2009), participants were strictly limited to 20 seconds of exposure to each ad to guard against the

Figure 1. Gain and loss messages in advertisements.

possibility that different viewing durations would produce reaction differences. In this process, to minimize possible order effects, the experimental stimuli were presented in the middle positions (second, third, and fourth spots), while two additional ads (orange juice and water bottle) that were not included in this study were placed in the bookend sequences. In addition, to further control for possible order effects, this study created three rotations that participants were equally divided among (Rotation 1: bananas, milk, potato chip/Rotation 2: milk, potato chip, bananas/Rotation 3: potato chip, bananas, milk). No statistical difference was found among the three rotations. When completed viewing the booklet, participants were asked to take a computer-based evaluative survey.

Analysis and Findings

In the experiment, the effect of message formats (gain and loss messages) was tested in a between-group comparison design while that of product types (organic, non-GMO, and antibiotics free) was examined in a within-group comparison design.

Impact of brand/organization familiarity and loyalty

Using Simonin and Ruth's (1998) brand familiarity scale, participants' brand familiarity and loyalty were checked. For the brand familiarity scale, this study included three items: brand familiarity,

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brand recognition, and previous exposure to brand. Index scores were formed by averaging the values of these items (Cronbach's α = .92 for organic condition, α = .98 for GMO condition, and α = .98 for antibiotics condition, respectively). The results show the brands used in this study were not familiar to participants at all (M = 1.35, SD = .76 for the organic condition, M = 1.28, SD = .91 for GMO, and M = 1.73, SD = 1.40 for antibiotics free conditions, respectably) and participants are not loyal to the brands: M = 1.38 (SD = .90) for Gold Acre (bananas), M = 1.20 (SD = .70) for Rockies (potato chips), and M = 1.33 (SD = .90) for Norman Farms (milk).

Message Frame Format Effect

This study found a significant difference from recall of the food labels, where participants more recalled labels in the loss message frame format conditions (M = .24, SE = .02) than those in gain message frame format conditions (M = .18, SE = .02), F (1, 218) = 4.19, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. For other measures, however, differences between two message formats were not significant.

Table 1

Between-Group Comparisons of Different Message Frame Formats

Dependent Variables	Gain Frame M (*SE*)	Loss Frame M (*SE*)	M²	*F*-value	Partial η²
Label Recall*	.18 (.02) $_A$	.24 (.02) $_B$	.21	4.19	.02
Label Recognition	.66 (.03)	.71 (.03)	.12	1.43	.01
Attitude toward warning labels	5.61 (.09)	5.53 (.09)	.32	.40	.00
Perceived value ($)	13.20 (.19)	13.54 (.20)	6.38	1.54	.01
Purchase intention	4.53 (.12)	4.46 (.12)	.24	.15	.00
Willingness to pay more	4.12 (.13)	3.88 (.14)	3.09	1.56	.01
Amount to pay more (%)	19.15 (1.71)	16.91 (1.85)	218.90	.79	.01

Note: A: Subscripts placing next to the mean (standard error) indicate significant difference among breaks in one-way ANOVA at a .05 significance level (i.e., $_A < {}_B$). B: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

Product Category Effects

The results show the effectiveness of food labels is significantly different among the three product types in all seven measures. First, participants recalled the food labels significantly better in the organic (bananas) condition (M = .41, SE = .03) than those in the antibiotic free (milk) condition (M = .16, SE = .02), which also was significantly better recalled than those in the non-GMO (potato chips) condition (M = .06, SE = .02), F (2, 217) = 45.23, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$. For food label recognition, labels in the organic (M = .76, SE = .03) and antibiotics free (M = .73, SE = .03) conditions were better recognized than those in the non-GMO condition (M = .55, SE = .03), F (2, 215) = 14.43, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Similarly, attitude toward food labels showed labels in the antibiotics free (M = 5.86, SE = .08) and organic (M = 5.73, SE = .07) conditions were more favorably evaluated than those in the non-GMO condition (M = 5.12, SE = .09), F (2, 217) = 37.84, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .26$.

For the perceived value of organic alternatives, participants perceived the monetary value ($) of organic versions of bananas in the organic condition (M = $14.14, SE = .19) was significantly higher than those for milk in the antibiotic free condition (M = $13.30, SE = .18), which was also significantly higher than those for potato chips in the non-GMO condition (M = $12.68, SE = .15), F (2, 211) = 37.04, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .26$. Similarly, analyses of purchase intention, likelihood to pay more, and amount to pay more also show the same pattern. Results indicate purchase intention for bananas (*M* = 4.96, *SE* = .09) was significantly higher than those for milk (*M* = 4.50, *SE* = .12), which was also higher than for potato chips (*M* = 4.03, *SE* = .12), $F(2, 217) = 30.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$. For the measure of the likelihood to pay more, participants reported higher likelihood to pay for bananas (*M* = 4.74, *SE* = .12) than milk (*M* = 4.11, *SE* = .14), which also was significantly higher than potato chips (*M* = 3.15, *SE* = .12), $F(2, 216) = 70.38, p < .001, \eta^2 = .40$. Finally, participants indicated they are more willing to pay extra for bananas in the organic condition (*M* = 23.65%, *SE* = 1.69) than milk in the antibiotic free condition (*M* = 18.67%, *SE* = 1.53), which also was significantly higher than potato chips in the non-GMO condition (*M* = 11.77%, *SE* = 1.14), $F(2, 172) = 40.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = .32$.

Table 2

Within-Group Comparisons of Different Product Categories

Dependent Variables	Organic M (*SE*)	Non-GMO M (*SE*)	Antibiotics Free M (*SE*)	Wilks' λ	*F*-value	Partial η^2
Label Recall***	$.41\ (.03)_C$	$.06\ (.02)_A$	$.16\ (.02)_B$	.71	45.23	.29
Label Recognition***	$.76\ (.03)_B$	$.55\ (.03)_A$	$.73\ (.03)_B$	.88	14.43	.12
Attitude toward Food Labels***	$5.73\ (.07)_B$	$5.12\ (.09)_A$	$5.86\ (.08)_B$	.74	37.84	.26
Perceived Value ($)***	$14.14\ (.19)_C$	$12.68\ (.15)_A$	$13.30\ (.18)_B$	.74	37.04	.26
Purchase Intention***	$4.96\ (.09)_C$	$4.03\ (.12)_A$	$4.50\ (.12)_B$	.78	30.02	.22
Willingness to Pay More***	$4.74\ (.12)_C$	$3.15\ (.12)_A$	$4.11\ (.14)_B$	.61	70.38	.40
Amount to Pay More (%)***	$23.65\ (1.69)_C$	$11.77\ (1.14)_A$	$18.67\ (1.53)_B$	.68	40.52	.32

Note: A: Subscripts placing next to the mean (standard error) indicate significant difference among breaks in one-way ANOVA at a .05 significance level (i.e., $_A < _B$). B: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

Interaction Effects of Message Frame Format in Different Product Category

Interactions between the message formats and product types were determined in two ways: interaction effects of message formats in product categories and those of product category in message formats. Regarding the interaction effects of message formats in product categories, this study found significant interaction effects in food label recall and recognition. Findings of interaction effects of message formats in product categories are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3
Interaction Effects of Message Frame Formats within Different Product Categories

Dependent Variables	Product Categories	Gain Frame M (*SE*)	Loss Frame M (*SE*)	M^2	*F*-value	Partial η^2
Label Recall	Organic	.38 (.05)	.44 (.05)	.14	.59	.00
	Non-GMO	.07 (.02)	.06 (.02)	.01	.23	.00
	Antibiotics Free**	.08 (.03)$_A$	.23 (.03)$_B$	1.26	9.56	.04
Label Recognition	Organic	.77 (.04)	.79 (.04)	.02	.12	.00
	Non-GMO	.60 (.05)	.51 (.05)	.35	1.43	.01
	Antibiotics Free ***	.63 (.04)$_A$	.83 (.04)$_B$	2.20	11.66	.05
Attitude toward Food Labels	Organic	5.76 (.10)	5.69 (.10)	.25	.22	.00
	Non-GMO	5.20 (.13)	5.05 (.13)	1.22	.68	.00
	Antibiotics Free	5.86 (.11)	5.85 (.11)	.01	.01	.00
Perceived value ($)	Organic	13.88 (.26)	14.39 (.28)	13.62	1.75	.01
	Non-GMO	12.67 (.21)	12.69 (.22)	.02	.004	.00
	Antibiotics Free	13.04 (.24)	13.55 (.26)	14.10	2.13	.01
Purchase intention	Organic	4.94 (.13)	4.98 (.13)	.09	.05	.00
	Non-GMO	4.18 (.17)	3.87 (.17)	5.22	1.66	.01
	Antibiotics Free	4.46 (.17)	4.53 (.18)	.27	.08	.00
Willingness to pay more	Organic	4.88 (.16)	4.21 (.16)	4.61	1.61	.01
	Non-GMO	3.26 (.17)	3.03 (.17)	2.98	.94	.00
	Antibiotics Free	4.21 (.19)	4.02 (.20)	1.95	.47	.00
Amount to pay more (%)	Organic	25.79 (2.30)	21.51 (2.47)	797.40	1.61	.01
	Non-GMO	12.35 (1.55)	11.20 (1.67)	57.89	.26	.00
	Antibiotics Free	19.32 (2.08)	18.03 (2.24)	72.90	.18	.00

Note: A: Subscripts placing next to the mean (standard errors) indicate significant difference among breaks in one-way ANOVA at a .05 significance level (i.e., $_A < _B$). B: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

The results of follow-up tests show in the antibiotics condition participants recalled the food label (antibiotics free) embedded in the loss message frame (M = .23, SE = .03) significantly better than that embedded in the gain message frame (M = .08, SE = .03), F (1, 218) = 9.96, p < .01, η^2 = .04. Similarly, in the antibiotics free conditions, participants recognized food label message in the loss message format (M = .83, SE = .04) better than that in the gain message format (M = .63, SE = .04), F (1, 216) = 11.66, p < .001, η^2 = .05.

Interaction Effects of Product Category in Different Message Frame Format

Significant interaction effects of product category in two message formats were detected from all seven dependent measures (see Table 4).

Table 4
Interaction Effects of Product Categories within Different Message Frame Formats

Dependent Variables	PSA Mood	Organic M (*SE*)	Non-GMO M (*SE*)	Antibiotics Free M (*SE*)	Wilks' λ	*F*-value	Partial η^2
Label Recall	Gain Frame***	.38 (.05)$_B$	.07 (.02)$_A$	.08 (.03)$_A$	.85	19.75	.15
	Loss Frame***	.44 (.05)$_C$	.06 (.02)$_A$	.23 (.03)$_B$	.79	29.42	.15
Label Recognition	Gain Frame**	.77 (.04)$_B$	.60 (.05)$_A$	.63 (.04)$_A$	.96	5.06	.05
	Loss Frame***	.79 (.04)$_B$	.51 (.05)$_A$	.83 (.04)$_B$	.88	15.31	.13
Attitude toward Food Labels	Gain Frame***	5.76 (.10)$_B$	5.20 (.13)$_A$	5.86 (.11)$_B$	.87	16.08	.13
	Loss Frame***	5.69 (.10)$_B$	5.05 (.13)$_A$	5.85 (.11)$_B$	.83	21.95	.17
Perceived Value ($)	Gain Frame***	13.88 (.26)$_B$	12.67 (.21)$_A$	13.04 (.24)$_A$	.88	13.96	.12
	Loss Frame***	14.39 (.28)$_C$	12.69 (.22)$_A$	13.55 (.26)$_B$	.82	23.93	.19
Purchase Intention	Gain Frame***	4.94 (.13)$_B$	4.18 (.17)$_A$	4.46 (.17)$_A$	.91	10.72	.09
	Loss Frame***	4.98 (.13)$_C$	3.87 (.17)$_A$	4.53 (.18)$_B$	.84	20.41	.16
Willingness to Pay More	Gain Frame***	4.88 (.16)$_C$	3.26 (.17)$_A$	4.21 (.19)$_B$	.75	36.90	.26
	Loss Frame***	4.59 (.16)$_C$	3.03 (.17)$_A$	4.02 (.20)$_B$	.76	35.59	.24
Amount to Pay More (%)	Gain Frame***	25.79 (2.30)$_C$	12.35 (1.55)$_A$	19.32 (2.08)$_B$	.76	27.43	.24
	Loss Frame***	21.51 (2.47)$_B$	11.20 (1.67)$_A$	18.03 (2.24)$_B$	.85	14.85	.15

Note: A: Subscripts placing next to the mean (standard error) indicate significant difference among breaks in one-way ANOVA at a .05 significance level (i.e., $_A < _B < _C$). B: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

The follow-up tests showed in the gain message format participants recalled labels significantly better in the organic condition (M = .38, SE = .03) than those in the antibiotics free (M = .08, SE = .03) and non-GMO (M = .07, SE = .02) conditions, F (2, 217) = 19.75, p < .001, η^2 = .15. In the loss message format, participants recalled food labels better in the organic conditions (M = .44, SE = .05) than those in the antibiotics free (M = .23, SE = .03), which is also significantly different from those in the non-GMO condition (M = .06, SE = .02), F (2, 217) = 29.42, p < .001, η^2 = .21.

A similar pattern was observed with food label recognition. In the gain message format condition, food labels in the organic conditions (M = .77, SE = .04) were better recognized than those in the antibiotics free (M = .63, SE = .04) and non-GMO (M = .60, SE = .05) condition, F (2, 215) = 5.06, p < .01, η^2 = .05. In the loss message format condition, participants recognized food labels in the antibiotics free (M = .83, SE = .04) and organic (M = .79, SE = .04) conditions more than the non-GMO condition (M = .51, SE = .05), F (2, 215) = 15.31, p < .001, η^2 = .13.

In terms of the attitude toward food labels, regardless of message formats, messages in the antibiotics free (gain message format: M = 5.86, SE = .11; loss message format: M = 5.85, SE = .11) and organic (gain message format: M = 5.76, SE = .10; loss message format: M = 5.69, SE = .10) conditions were more favorably evaluated than those in the non-GMO condition (gain message format: M = 5.20, SE = .13; loss message format: M = M = 5.05, SE = .13), (gain message format: F (2, 217) = 16.08, p < .001, η^2 = .13; loss message format: F (2, 217) = 21.95, p < .001, η^2 = .17).

For the perceived value of organic counterparts, participants reported products in the organic condition would be more expensive than those in the other conditions. In the gain message format condition, participants perceived the price of the organic version of bananas (M = $13.88, SE = .26) would be considerably more than that of milk (M = $13.04, SE = .24) and potato chips (M = $12.67, SE = .21), F (2, 211) = 13.96, p < .001, η^2 = .11. In the loss message format condition, participants perceived the organic version of bananas (M = $14.39, SE = .28) would be more expensive than milk

(M = \$13.55, SE = .26), which is also more expensively perceived than potato chips (M = \$12.69, SE = .22), $F(2, 211) = 23.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$.

For the purchase intention of the product from the ads with organic labels, participants showed higher intention for bananas (M = 4.94, SE = .13) than milk (M = 4.46, SE = .17) and potato chips (M = 4.18, SE = .17) in the gain message format condition, $F(2, 217) = 10.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$. In the loss message format, participants also showed higher purchase intention for bananas (M = 4.98, SE = .13) than milk (M = 4.46, SE = .17), which is also different from potato chips in the non-GMO condition (M = 3.87, SE = .17), $F(2, 217) = 20.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$.

For the measure of the likelihood to pay more, regardless of message formats, participants showed higher willingness to pay more for bananas (gain message format: M = 4.88, SE = .16; loss message format: M = 4.59, SE = .16) than milk (gain message format: M = 4.21, SE = .19; loss message format: M = 4.02, SE = .20), which is also subsequently higher than potato chips (gain message format: M = 3.26, SE = .17; loss message format: M = 3.03, SE = .17), (gain message format: $F(2,216) = 36.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .26$; loss message format: $F(2, 216) = 33.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$). In terms of amount of pay extra, participants are willing to pay significantly more for bananas (M = 25.79%, SE = 2.30) than milk (M = 19.32%, SE = 2.08), which is also more than potato chips (M = 12.35%, SE = 1.55) in the gain message format condition, $F(2, 172) = 27.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$. In the loss message condition, participants reported they are willing to pay more for bananas (M = 21.51%, SE = 2.47) and milk (M = 18.03%, SE = 2.24) than potato chips (M = 11.20%, SE = 1.67), $F(2, 172) = 14.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the effects of gain- and loss-framed messages in magazine food advertisements. Prior research has demonstrated the effectiveness of gain vs. loss frames depends upon the mindset of consumers and whether they perceive the health behavior presented to be prevention-oriented or promotion-oriented (Rothman, Bartels, Wlaschin, & Salovey, 2006). While this study found a significant difference in recall for the food labels in between the gain and loss conditions, this study did not find a significant difference between the two message formats for other measures. It is unclear whether consumers view the behavior of buying organic, GMO-free and antibiotics free foods as prevention-oriented or promotion-oriented. Indeed, consumers may view each of these types of purchases differently based on their knowledge and experience. Future research should be done to better understand the mindset of consumers toward these purchase behaviors.

This study took a unique look at gain/loss messages in magazine advertisements across three different food products — a fresh, plant-based product (bananas), a processed, plant-based product (potato chips), and a processed, animal-based product (milk). These food products were all unfamiliar brands for the study participants. Overall, the effect of the gain/loss frames was eclipsed by the effect of the product type and food labels. Participants indicated greater recall for the organic (bananas) message than they did for the antibiotic-free (milk) or GMO (potato chips) messages. The recall was also greater for the food labels found in the organic message. The GMO message was received less favorably, in terms of attitude, than the antibiotic or organic messages. These findings are consistent with research showing consumers perceive the use of biotechnology more favorably in plant-based foods (bananas and potato chips) than in animal-based foods (milk) and they perceive organic products differently than GMO products (Anderson, Wachenheim, & Lesch, 2006).

There are other potential reasons for the disparity in participant response to the bananas, potato chips and milk products. Bananas, even organic bananas, are a relatively inexpensive food product.

For our sample, college students, this may be one of a few organic food products within their economic reach. Familiarity with organic foods is also higher for many consumers than for GMO or non-GMO foods. Studies show that while GMO technology is prevalent in food products, risk perception is still prevalent for some consumers (He & Bernard, 2011; Costa-Font, Gil, & Traill, 2008; Onyango et al., 2003; Burton et al., 2001). Potato chips, while not expensive, are a fried food product and, thus, are not likely perceived as a healthy food option. It may be college students do not see a relative advantage in paying more for non-GMO potato chips because they are not purchasing potato chips with health in mind.

The effectiveness of the gain and loss messages differed depending on product type. It may be participants regarded some of the labels (organic, non-GMO, and antibiotics free) as promotion-oriented and others as prevention-oriented. Further research should be done to evaluate consumer understanding and interpretation of these labels.

Study Limitations

The sample for this study was college students. While these consumers often have limited resources to pay for premium food products, research shows they have positive attitudes toward alternative food production practices like those used in organic food production (Pelletier, Laska, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2013). The sample for this study was also predominantly female (86.8%). According to research from Boek, Bianco-Simeral, Chan and Goto (2012), gender significantly affects the way college students approach food choices. Other studies have shown college women place greater value on organic foods than college men (Pelletier, Laska, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2013). A sample with more gender diversity may have resulted in different responses to the food messages presented. This is an area for future research.

As food communicators develop messages to help consumers understand the differences between food products, it is important for them to understand how consumers evaluate food production practices and their respective food labels. Gain and loss frames may be effective in persuading consumers to purchase certain food products, but communicators will be most effective in employing these frames if they can discern how consumers view different food production practices.

Suggestions for Future Research

This was the first study to explore the effectiveness of food labels in advertisements considering message frame formats (gain and loss). Future research may take this area of study in several directions. First, a direct extension of this research may examine the factors influencing the effectiveness of food labels, such as demographic determinants (age, gender, and income) as well as personal characteristics (e.g., involvement, perceived threat, and nutrition knowledge) and history with products (degree of product usage, level of satisfaction, and familiarity). Second, other types of food-related issues/labels, such as pesticide-free product, locally-grown products, and the origin of products, could be explored for more comprehensive understanding of food label effectiveness. In addition, subsequent studies may compare the effectiveness of food labels with other types of labels, such as health/safety warning labels (e.g., smoking, drunk driving, and texting while driving) and environmental ecolabels (e.g., energy conservation, pollution, and resource recycling). Further, future research may investigate the role of creativity, viewers' involvement, context-generated mood, physiological status, and brand familiarity as potential moderating variables of the effectiveness of food labels.

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Research

Developing Writing Identity in an Advanced Agricultural Communications Media Writing Course

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Abstract

Writing is a complex process students use to interpret assumptions, make meaning, solidify intentions, and convey knowledge. The purpose of this study was to use Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of education and identity to understand students' perspectives on how their experience in an advanced agricultural communications media writing course helped them develop their identity as writers. At the end of the course, 57 students completed one-page reflections that were analyzed using content analytic induction (Patton, 2002) guided by Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of college student development. Students showed evidence of experiencing growth in each vector and became media writers who could identify themselves as writers even if they did not intend to pursue a writing career. Student-faculty relationships were key factors in writing identity development because students valued the instructor feedback and human connection. The second major assignment was the point at which they either identified themselves as writers or they did not. Perhaps this was because students were immersed in a structured writing process during that time. Students indicated the value is not in the word but in the author's ability to connect words into a cohesive structure that captures an audience. Based on this study, agricultural communications instructors should focus on teaching students the pathway to the end product and not focus on teaching the end product. More research, therefore, needs to be conducted on what components of the second major writing assignment helped students become more effective writers and helped them develop identity as writers.

Key Words

Advanced media writing, writing-intensive course, education and identity

Introduction

Is writing more than communication? It is a complex process that encompasses intricacies, functions, and possibilities (Gries, 2011). Writing as storytelling confirms identity, heartens others, and creates community (Tappenden, 2010). "The metacognitive nature of creative writing has freed the minds of learners and unleashed them to play again with their thoughts and construct them into their use of language as an art and form of communication" (Tappenden, 2010, p. 268). An understanding of discourse community contributes to students' ability to develop a sense of connection with their writing, allowing them to see writing as meaningful and worthwhile (Lunsford, Fishman, & Liew, 2013). "If it is language that defines and bounds us, then perhaps the most radical form of agency we can grant students is the ability to manipulate the very language and discourses that define them" (George, p. 340, 2012).

In the model to augment critical thinking and create knowledge through writing in the social sciences of agriculture, Leggette (2013) claimed the discourse community should be part of the larger social context. Beaufort (1999) described the discourse community as the community that guides the "network of communicative channels, oral and written, whose interplay affects the purposes and meanings of the written texts produced within the community" (Beaufort, 1999, pp. 18–19). Leggette (2013) argued the discourse community nurtures three writing elements: content or subject matter knowledge, cognitive processes, and confidence. Therefore, for students to build a strong discourse community, they should have subject matter knowledge, the capacity to develop cognitive processes, and confidence in their writing ability (Leggette, 2013).

When students arrive at college, they are growing as writers and facing new struggles in an unfamiliar academic environment (Brockman, Taylor, Kreth, & Crawford, 2011), or new social context and discourse community. College is an important time in students' personal transformation and growth (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), which has the potential to influence the students as writers (Brockman et al., 2011). During college, students encounter experiences that challenge their identities, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions, and they are forced to solidify those experiences in the presence of environmental influences (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Faculty members should empower "students to become aware of and proficient in the performance of those identities and roles that will now be expected of them within academia" (George, 2012, p. 321).

Students become effective writers through "deepening engagement and commitments, in lively association with other students and teachers, in fields of study they want to write about" (Gottschalk & Hjortshoj, 2004. p. v), essentially within their discourse community (Beaufort, 1999; Leggette, 2013). Effective writers use writing to learn, understand, and retain information (Foster, 1983; Strachan, 2008). Curriculum is important in students' ability to become effective writers. "Effective curriculums are achieved when a balance is found between student interest, faculty vision, and industry need" (Watson & Robertson, 2011, p. 16). Therefore, curriculum should be designed to foster students' development, help them develop identity, enhance their learning process and cognitive skills, and challenge their thoughts and beliefs (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Chickering and Reisser (1993) indicated college student development is best described as vectors, meaning to impart direction and magnitude (Foubert, Nixon, Sisson, & Barnes, 2005). Developing competence, the first of Chickering and Reisser's seven vectors, has three components: (a) intellectual competence (use of mental skills to comprehend, solve problems, reflect, analyze, synthesize, interpret, and engage in active learning); (b) physical and manual skills (use of body to increase performance, self-expression, and creativity); and (c) interpersonal competence (ability to listen, ask questions, provide feedback, and engage in meaningful conversations).

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) second vector is managing emotions — "anxiety, anger, depression, desire, guilt and shame have the power to derail the educational process when they become excessive or overwhelming" (p. 46). In college, students learn how to release vexations and cope with opportunities and challenges before exploding. The balance of self-control and self-expression guided by awareness and integration are important components of students' ability to manage emotions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The third vector describes students' movement through autonomy toward interdependence — mutually reliant relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). As students become interdependent, they learn to be self-sufficient, gain a sense of self-direction, and accept the responsibility of setting and reaching their goals. During the process, students become less reliant on constant feedback and more reliant on their ability to think critically and independently (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Vector four involves developing mature interpersonal relationships, including "tolerance and appreciation of differences [and] capacity for intimacy" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). Students learn to establish strong relationships and make enduring commitments with honesty, responsiveness, and respect as the foundation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Development includes learning how to share, accept differences, appreciate the good and bad, and build relationships that endure crises, distance, and separation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Establishing identity, the fifth vector, depends partially on the first four vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). "Development of identity includes … clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Established identity is a precursor to students' feeling of competence and worthwhileness. However, students' establishment of their overall identity is dependent on their ability to establish physical, sexual, personal, social, historical, cultural, and spiritual identity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

In the sixth vector, developing purpose, students increase their ability to assess their interests and options, illuminate their goals, make plans, and find opportunities despite challenges (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Developing purpose requires students to develop action plans and work toward work-life balance. It "involves a growing ability to unify one's many different goals within the scope of a larger, more meaningful purpose, and to exercise intentionally on a daily basis" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 50).

Developing integrity, the final vector, closely aligns with establishing identity and clarifying purposes. Chickering and Reisser (1993) wrote that developing integrity involves overlapping stages of humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Students will shift from strict beliefs in absolute rules to a relative outlook before choosing the rules to guide them and their life circumstances (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students, then, develop congruence when they achieve a behavior that is uniform with their individualized values (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Moreover, Chickering and Reisser (1993) wrote seven environmental factors — including student-faculty relationships, teaching, and curriculum — influence student development (Evans et al., 2010). Chickering and Reisser (1993) claimed "any environment is a system or a totality of interacting parts" (p. 279), suggesting "an educationally powerful environment coordinates all elements" (p. 279). Evans et al. (2010) emphasized Chickering and Reisser (1993) had a notable impact on interventions in higher education. It's important, however, to remain aware of the limitations of Chickering and Reisser's theory and to appreciate its value when used correctly (Evans et al., 2010). With this in mind, college instructors should acknowledge the usefulness of the seven vectors but remain intimately involved in the educational process and seek innovative approaches to student development.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of education and identity to understand students' perspectives of how their experience in an advanced agricultural communications media writing course helped them develop their identities as writers.

RQ1: What teaching techniques contributed to students' development of competence in an advanced media writing course?

RQ2: How does an advanced media writing course contribute to students' development of their sense of integrity and their professional identity and purpose as writers?

RQ3: How do students in an advanced media writing course move from being autonomous to be interdependent?

RQ4: How do students develop relationships and manage emotions in an advanced media writing course?

Context of the Study

Agricultural Media Writing II is an undergraduate major-specific course that is the second of two writing-intensive courses Texas A&M University students majoring or minoring in agricultural communications and journalism are required to complete. It builds on the skills learned in *Agricultural Media Writing I* by allowing students to apply those skills to increasingly complex writing situations. Students write soft news stories for print and electronic media. They learn how to gather information from interviews and print materials, format stories for a particular medium, and write for a target audience. Course exercises and feedback help students refine their editing skills as they develop competencies that would be expected in professional settings. Upon completion of the course, students should be comfortable with gathering information; be able to write clearly, creatively and concisely using Associated Press (AP) style; and have obtained a basic knowledge of how to report facts in a clearly objective manner.

Agricultural Media Writing II is taught each fall, spring, and summer semester. The 15-week, two-component course met four days a week and was taught during the spring 2014 semester. The lecture component of the course met twice weekly and was 50 minutes in length. The laboratory component met twice weekly and was 75 minutes in length. The course featured weekly lectures designed to stimulate creativity, improve writing skills, and serve as a complement to the course's laboratory exercises and major writing assignments. The laboratory exercises included AP style quizzes, copy editing exercises, group work, research assignments, and weekly small incremental assignments that funneled into the course's major assignments. An instructor was present and available to assist students during each laboratory session.

Students were required to complete three major writing assignments. For the first major assignment, students were given the option of writing a column or a review. The column option allowed students to write about any topic with some connection to agriculture. The review option required students to write a review about a restaurant, movie, or book. Criteria for the first assignment included 500 to 600 words; proper attribution, grammar, and mechanics; and a topic statement specifying a target audience and target publication for the story.

The second major assignment was an informational/educational or how-to soft news story. Students could pick their topic for the second major assignment as long as it was connected to agriculture. Criteria for the second assignment included 600 to 800 words, use of at least two interview sources and one print source, and proper attribution, grammar, and mechanics. Prior to topic approval, students submitted a query letter that included a discussion of the topic, a target audience, a target publication, the student's qualification to write about the topic, and the method of follow up.

For major assignment three, students completed a personality profile or a descriptive soft news story. Students selected their own topic as long as it was related in some way to agriculture. Criteria for the third major assignment included 1,000 to 1,200 words with a minimum of three interview sources and one print source as well as proper attribution, grammar, and mechanics. A query letter also was required for major assignment three.

Formative and summative feedback was provided within one week for laboratory assignments and two weeks for major assignments, and students could rewrite each of the major writing assignments. An important ingredient in major writing assignments two and three was a peer edit conducted during a regularly scheduled laboratory session. Students were required to complete peer reviews. However, they were given the liberty to incorporate the suggested revisions and edits as they saw fit. Mandatory editor meetings with the course instructor were required for each students' third major assignment.

Method

This qualitative study investigated how agricultural communications students in an advanced media writing course developed writing identity. We sought deep insights from students into the developmental challenges they faced during the course as well as how they constructed their own identity framework throughout the course. We also recognized the intimate interaction between the environment and the students made it impossible to separate the course context from the students themselves. For these reasons, this research problem necessitated investigation by qualitative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the course, the instructor asked all students to complete a one-page reflection evaluating their experiences in the course. These evaluative reflections served as the data for this study. The population for this study was undergraduate agricultural communications students enrolled in *Agricultural Media Writing II* at Texas A&M University during the spring 2014 semester (N = 57). The majority of the students were upper-class, female students majoring in agricultural communications and journalism. Prior to enrolling in the advanced media writing course, students had completed an introductory media writing course. Students were asked to reflect on their advanced media writing course experience by answering four questions:

1. Describe yourself as a writer before this class and now.
2. What class activities helped you the most (e.g., peer review, instructor feedback, AP style quizzes)?
3. At what point in the course did you begin to see writing differently?
4. How has this course helped develop your idea of writing as a profession?

Each participant received a random two-digit number identifier ranging from one to 57. Each one-page reflection was unitized or broken down into words and phrases that held meaning as a unit (Merriam, 2009). Each unit was labeled with a sequential code. Therefore, the first unit of student 25 was labeled as 25:01.

Data were analyzed using analytic induction (Patton, 2002). Analytic induction uses an established theory to provide a framework for analyzing qualitative data, extending the application of that theory into new contexts. In this case, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of college student development was used as the lens through which we analyzed the student reflection data to extend the understanding of college student development into development of writing identity. Although the data aligned with the seven vectors outlined in Chickering and Reisser's theory of education and identity, the data were not collected based on the theory. After we began the initial data analysis, we realized the data fit the theory. At that time, we chose analytic induction using Chickering and Reisser's theory. Within each vector, the data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative studies require special attention to trustworthiness. To achieve credibility (Merriam, 2009), the certainty that findings match reality, we kept a reflexive journal and engaged in persistent observation. The course instructors kept reflexive journals through their teaching experience and through the course of the data analysis. Instructors achieved persistent observation as they taught students throughout the semester.

To achieve dependability (Merriam, 2009), the certainty that results are consistent with the data, we triangulated the data, circulated peer debriefing memos, and kept an audit trail. Data were triangulated using theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and instructor observation. Instructors and researchers circulated peer debriefing memos among ourselves and to other qualified peers as a check of our analysis. The audit trail connects the data to the theory, and that served as our interpretive framework. To achieve transferability (Merriam, 2009), or applicability to other outside settings, we used thick description in reporting the results so readers might be able to easily determine whether the findings could apply to their own settings. Reflexive journals, triangulation, and peer debriefing memos also served to build confirmability, assurance of objectivity (Merriam, 2009).

Findings

Students in this course experienced joys and frustrations, setbacks and victories during the semester. A central question students asked themselves was, "Do I have what it takes to be a writer?" (25.01). Students wrestled with this question through struggling to gain skills by analyzing and personalizing their values of self and of writing, by taking on writing responsibilities and challenges, and by balancing their emerging feelings with feedback from others and their past notions of what it means to write.

Research Question One

Which teaching techniques contributed to the development of students' writing skill competence in this course? Students needed to develop specific skillsets to achieve the learning outcomes for the course and to complete the required assignments and experiences. One student noted, "I was always so scared to write, and I didn't truly love it, but now I have confidence" (6.11). So, how did students develop skills and confidence in those skills?

At first, students finished writing assignments by "throw[ing] things together" (51.08) and "sitting in front of a computer and typing … until reach[ing] the desired word count" (34.12). As students reflected on their beginning approach and skill level, one noted lectures were "uncomfortable and made me squirm" (20.11).

Although lecture caused some students to "squirm, it was the clicking point where I learned" (20.11) valuable writing skills. One student recalled a specific lecture, "I really enjoyed the Oreo lecture because it was fun and a cool way to apply what we were doing" (48.05). Applying lecture concepts in daily writing exercises "helped make writing more enjoyable" (31.15). Students noted that, during lecture, "I realized the only way to be a better writer is to practice" (27.19). Opportunities to apply concepts in guided settings supported this student's adoption of the approach in writing that "the order of information is … key to writing a great piece" (24.03).

"Credible edits" (24.07) helped students gain skills like "mak[ing] my writing more efficient" (24.07). The instructor "did things that really helped develop us individually, instead of just teaching us the steps of writing a feature story or a review" (31.15). Instructor and peer feedback helped students improve their savvy as not only producers of writing but also consumers of writing. They noted the desire to "write something everyone wants to read" (24.06). The journalistic style "made reading the paper easier as the reader's eye was more willing to dive into a digestible short paragraph rather than a longwinded large paragraph" (40.05). They realized good authors were skilled at "beckoning the reader to continue through their work" (40.05) and were "challenge[d] to take [their] story telling talents to the next level" (49.05).

To assist students in developing journalistic style writing skills, they completed writing style quizzes in class. Some found them a positive skill challenge, saying "I found these [AP style quizzes] very helpful" (57.11). Others disdained these exercises as "rarely help[ing] me improve as a writer" (19.13). Almost all students, however, did see that they "serve a purpose" (19.13) of enhancing their skillset. Class experiences helped students apply their writing skills and do hands-on work (48.05) to become better writers through "practice" (27.19) and increase their skills and "confidence" (6.11) as both consumers and producers of writing.

Research Question Two

How did this course contribute to students' integrated sense of self and to their professional identity as writers? Students grew in their perception of themselves as potential writing professionals and in their overall sense of self as competent and worthwhile writers. "I have always been someone that thought words are a powerful thing, and this class just reinforced that" (41.02).

One portion of students felt that the class "reinforced" (41.02) their path while another reflected that the class had turned them off — "I just don't love it like I did before" (30.11). What was the difference between these two distinct groups?

Students in the first group reflected positively on the class exercises. These students enjoyed peer and instructor feedback, noting that "it was a breakthrough … [and] made me break out of my shell a little bit and feel more comfortable with myself and my style of writing" (34.06). Another student noted getting acclimated to taking criticism "without getting offended is something that takes time to develop" (17.03). Students in this group also showed positive sentiment toward the style taught in the class — it "unlocked a whole new world in writing" (46.10). One student noted, "playing the field as a writer is a very important aspect, especially in the news world, but being able to adjust yourself and your writing style is imperative" (4.19).

These students also "had fun interviewing people and writing in this class" (20.14). They reported falling "in love with writing" (43.12) and "looking at positions that require a lot of writing" (6.13) because they knew they could be "successful in that career" (20.14).

On the other hand, the group that "[didn't] love it like they did before" (30.11) had difficulties with the experiences offered by the course. The peer feedback experiences caused one student to reflect, "I do not want to be a professional writer … I already get intimidated enough when a peer edits my paper. I would sweat bullets if I had a professional editor edit my paper every week" (35.35). Even after multiple exposures to style quizzes, these students recognized they "have a bad habit of voicing [their] opinion in works, allowing [their] style to show" (4.13). These students reflected, "I'm not sure it's the path I want to take anymore" (30.11), but considered it "a viable option for which [they] were qualified" (30.11). Students also noted desiring "to be a better writer" (53.11) even though they were not indicating a desire to pursue a career in writing.

In the end, students universally reflected "writers were undervalued" (21.12) and writing was more challenging than they expected. "I like the idea of writing as a profession more than the actual act of writing" (17.09). Students began to see the beauty and universal value of writing used to "paint beautiful pictures" (5.14) and moved forward in their understanding of themselves as a part of the writing profession.

Research Question Three

How do students move from autonomy to interdependence in a writing course? How do students learn to take responsibility for their goals, to become self-directed, and to think critically? Students developed the ability to "take everyone's suggestions, but … had enough faith" (34.08) in themselves to make good writers' decisions.

In the beginning, students saw writing processes as "simple" (12.05) and "boring" (49.01). They appraised their writing as "poor" (16.01) and without "organized structure" (16.01). The course challenged students. "I never thought a writing class could be so demanding. Even though we just had three papers, each one challenged me in a different way" (57.07). Also, interviewing people for a story challenged students' perception that "research was boring" (49.01). A student noted feeling "scared" (19.11) before she started, but did the activity anyway. "After I asked one person, it was like a wall fell down" (19.11).

Journalistic style challenged students' disorganization. One student reflected that before, "writing [was] like a painting, a mixing of colors coming together to make something beautiful" (49.09). But after the course, writing was more of an "equation" (49.09) that could be seen either way, "depending on what I want to write" (49.09).

Writing "what I want to write" (49.09) and seeing the "rough drafts become better each time I made changes" (3.07) helped students become more self-directed. A few students noted they planned to take on novel-writing projects in their free time and knew that "tak[ing] time out of each day to write" (25.04) would help them become better writers. Daily practice would help them "see the paper with fresh eyes" (25.04) every day.

In addition to daily practice, students saw the value of feedback in making their work better. "Positive encouragement is great to hear, and negative feedback helps make your work even stronger, so it was a win-win situation" (37.08). Students saw this kind of interaction as critical to learning, "The harsher the criticism, the more it is remembered" (4.10).

Overall, students took on new challenges to interact with themselves and with others in ways that gave them "faith in [themselves]" (34.08), a "want to write" (49.09), an increase in their "organization structure" (49.09), and a need to overcome the feeling of being "scared" (19.11) about writing processes.

Research Question Four

How do students handle developing relationships and managing emotions through a writing course? Initially, students felt "scare[d]" (29.11) and "nerve rack[ed]" (42.06) by reviewing their peers' work. They felt like writing was a "monster" (7.02) and "a stale burden" (9.09). How did they move toward feeling "comfortable" (50.07) with their peers and feeling like writing was "insightful and therapeutic?" (28.12)

In the beginning, students reflected that past writing assignments had caused them to feel they had "lost confidence in … writing" (38.03), so they "shied away from it" (38.03). By taking advantage of the daily practice offered in class and participating in the course experiences, students "began to view writing as more of a creative process rather than a stale burden" (29.11). By undergoing this process, this student noted "writing became fun and colorful" (29.11) while communicating the perception "it was still really hard" (29.11). By tackling the class experiences, students experienced "how insightful and therapeutic writing can be" (28.12) in helping process life experiences.

Peer reviews put students into novel forms of student-to-student relationships. Through the course, students "learned how to peer review" (9.05). Students were aware of the new position and the "nerve racking" (42.06) balance of issuing critique to peers "because [they] didn't want to come off as picky or overcritical" (42.06). As the assignments progressed and students practiced this new social frame, they became more "comfortable asking questions [their] peers might not want to deal with" (50.07). Students also received instructor feedback that helped students "see the instructor's style of writing" (36.08) and understand how to perform to the instructor's standards. That student noted taking the instructor feedback sessions "more seriously than a friend reading it" (36.08). One student noted the value of peer review for class performance, "on major assignment 2, my peer review

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helped me to the point where my whole paper had to be changed because it was not written correctly" (14.05).

Through practicing writing and peer reviewing, students were able to "see that journalism isn't quite the monster [they] made it out to be" (7.02). Students began to see writing as "fun and colorful" (9.09) as well as "therapeutic" (28.12). The fear of being seen as "picky and overcritical" (42.06) during peer review was replaced by feeling "comfortable" (50.07) asking difficult questions. Students processed new social forms and difficult emotions through the course experiences.

This course offered students an array of opportunities to experience the ups and downs of college student life. Students gained "confidence" (6.11) in skills they gained. They experienced things that "reinforced" (41.02) their perceptions of themselves as writers or "intimidated" (35.15) them, causing them to rethink their career paths. Students noted a "demanding" (57.07) class helped them "have faith in themselves" (34.08) and in their peer interactions. Students began to see writing as a fun, therapeutic outlet where peer critique became a comfortable and valuable form of interaction.

The question of "Do I have what it takes to be a writer?" (25.01) was answered in many ways through the course experiences. It was answered differently by different students. Almost universally, though, students felt writing was a "vital skill" (51.07) for any job and felt more "qualified" (30.11) to take on writing activities — from "looking at positions that require a lot of writing" (6.13) to "not sure" (30.11) if it was their desired path.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Students in the spring 2014 *Agricultural Media Writing II* used the course as a vehicle to become media writers who could identify themselves as writers even if they did not intend to pursue a writing career. In this study, students showed evidence of moving through, at different times and at different rates, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of college student development.

Student-faculty relationships, noted by Chickering and Reisser (1993) as influential in college student development, were key factors in students' development of their writing identity. Feedback was a key player in students' ability to move from being autonomous to being interdependent and helped them become more confident in their writing abilities. Students valued the human connection and the one-on-one feedback the instructor provided them, and they appreciated the encouragement received from their peers, which Chickering and Reisser (1993) described as developing interpersonal competence. Although peer feedback was not as constructive or as powerful as students would have liked, it did help them become critics of others' work and become more effective and engaging writers.

Each phase of the course was taught independently but connected to help students understand and work through the writing process, which is a factor important to students' movement from autonomous to interdependent (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students showed improvement throughout the semester, but the majority of them cited the second major assignment as the turning point assignment and the point at which they either identified themselves as writers or they did not. Perhaps this was because students were engaged and immersed in a structured writing process for the development of the second major assignment. Students were walked through and provided feedback at each step in the process — from brainstorming and query letter proposal to final revisions and edits. This teaching method helped students to not only understand the writing process but also improve each step before it had the potential to negatively impact their grades.

Reading story examples during class helped students improve their creative writing abilities because they were given the opportunity to engage in free writing that enabled them to be creators and not just writers. A prerequisite to the advanced media writing course is the basic media writing course where students learn about hard news writing and how to write for quick consumption using who, what, when, where, and why. Therefore, the first four weeks of the advanced media writing course is designed to help students become more creative media writers who stay true to the facts while telling a compelling story. Media writing relies on the author's ability to tell the story in a creative way that engages the reader. Students engaged in creative writing exercises that enhanced their writing style and voice and moved them to become story tellers and not just writers. Tappenden noted in 2010 that telling stories confirms identity. Thus, as students tell stories in a media writing course, they have the potential to confirm and develop identity, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) fifth vector. Perhaps, giving students the opportunity to hone their creativity skills and tell stories contributed to their course enjoyment.

Students' thoughts about writing changed as a result of the course. Leggette (2013) noted an understanding of discourse community is important to seeing writing as worthwhile because the discourse community encourages cognitive processes and writing confidence. Because of the discourse community established within the course, students, now, understand and respect effective writing and writing professions even if they choose not to pursue a writing career. They understand being an author takes work because writing is more than grammar and punctuation.

The course guided students' values and behaviors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) in adopting new writing practices — they now conduct in-depth topic-related research, write every day in short increments, read their stories aloud while revising and editing, and seek advice and opinions from peers. Some students came into the advanced media writing course with an understanding of writing-related values, but they had not yet personalized those values (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). For example, student four seemed to be at a critical point in establishing writing identity and a slight push one way or the other by the professor may have had an impact on her personalization of writing values. The value is not in the word but in the author's ability to connect words into a cohesive structure that captures an audience.

Chickering and Reisser's theory of education and identity has not been cited as a commonly used theory in written communication research, but it does have applicability. Extending the theory into the writing classroom has unique implications that could transform writing instruction in agricultural communication programs. Based on the evidence provided in this study, agricultural communications instructors should focus on teaching students the pathway to the end product and not focus on teaching the end product. When students work through the process, they immerse themselves into telling the story, an input for confirming identity and building community (Tappenden, 2010). Instructors should stress the importance of storytelling and not just writing because authors may be more invested in their work when they can identify with the story.

Further, the environment (discourse community) was important in students' development of confidence and cognitive processes because they gained constructive feedback that helped them work through the writing process, also noted by Leggette (2013). Writing done in a solitary or group environment needs constructive feedback in an organized, guided manner. The feedback process should be a structured process that includes both instructor and peer feedback. Instructors should provide students feedback during each phase of the writing process to be proactive in catching mistakes. Moreover, instructors should use the feedback process as a chance to teach students how to provide critiques and valuable, constructive feedback to their peers because providing feedback is a skill students can learn and transfer to other capacities.

It is important to note this study cannot be generalized beyond the population because it is one study conducted with a specific cohort at a particular time. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted on what components of the second major writing assignment helped students become more effective writers and helped them develop identity as writers. Chickering and Reisser (1993) noted the importance of environmental influences in students' development that are prevalent in media writing courses and should be explored to determine the most influential environmental influences. Additionally, more research needs to be conducted on the environments that encourage students' creativity in media writing.

Implications

Undeniably, students developed their writing identity in the advanced media writing course. Students' development of their writing identity was enhanced by the environmental influences Chickering and Reisser explored in-depth in 1993. The environment, or discourse community, in which the writing occurs, impacts the level and breadth that the student gains confidence (Leggette, 2013), which impacts students' identity development. Students were given the opportunity to be creative in an environment that encouraged content development guided by consistent feedback and writing practice, which should be representative of the professional writing environment. Consequently, agricultural communications instructors should work to provide students with a realistic environment representative of the workplace.

Understanding how students develop identity will help agricultural communications instructors not only prepare students to communicate but also equip them with the education and identity they need to contribute to the 21st century workforce. Students enter college looking to find themselves and identify with their role in society, as George noted in 2012. Therefore, because writing can be used as a tool to clarify meaning, students can use opportunities in media writing courses to establish their identity and clarify their purpose and career goals.

Hence, writing is a tool to interpret assumptions, make meaning, solidify intentions, and convey knowledge. Writing is more than communication.

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