A Journey to a Global Scholar Identity: An Autoethnography of Agricultural and

Extension Faculty's Experiences

Introduction and Literature Review

As faculty members at any stage of their career navigate their journey through higher education, goals such as tenure, recognition of writing achievements, or innovation in teaching begin to emerge (Bailey & Helvie-Mason, 2011). These goals become the guide for teaching and scholarly activity decisions as faculty members navigate the complexities of academic positions. The goals also guide the lines of research inquiry faculty use to develop research programs at their respective institutions (Bailey & Helvie-Mason, 2011).

These decisions, coupled with personal goals and passions, are the building blocks each faculty member must piece together for the foundation of their expertise. This expertise will lead them to success, which in academia has no common definition, but is often set by individual university standards or the faculty member themselves (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Sampson et al., 2010). However, the pressures of working in tenure track faculty positions have caused many faculty and graduate students to reconsider careers in academia (Gewin, 2022). Understanding the career journey of faculty in international agricultural and extension education (AEE) could be insightful to better understand this niche discipline and be informative to other faculty and graduate students along their own journeys. This article explores the journeys of three faculty members in international AEE.

To understand the career journey of faculty in international AEE, it is helpful to provide some context. International AEE faculty must first navigate being faculty in the academy, then

being in the AEE discipline, and finally as someone working in the niche area of international AEE.

Faculty At Large

It has been argued that the first documented academy began with Plato and has since developed into a diverse, organized system with a variety of disciplines (McElreavy et al., 2022). Regardless of discipline, in today's academic world, faculty are expected to progress through their career in a variety of ways. This progress has been documented most often through three categories: (1) teaching, (2) research, and (3) extension/service (Hardin & Hodges, 2006) to create the widely known system of reward called promotion and tenure (P&T) (O'meara, 2010). O'meara (2010) documented that many faculty are "influence[d] by their reward systems to prioritize some work activities over others" (p. 272). This influence has become vital to understand because it can direct an entire career for a faculty member seeking to continually develop in the university system. This causes the faculty member to disregard ideas or projects if it does not fit within the goals or mission of their university (Camblin & Steger, 2000). Leslie (2014) further argued that the closer a faculty member's values align with the those of their university, the more likely they were to feel satisfied in their career. Consequently, faculty often experience a series of career stages along their academic journey and their attributes vary over time (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). Factors such as organizational context, culture, and socialization have also been found to influence faculty success across their career stages (Lumpkin, 2014). Baldwin and Blackburn (1981) characterized faculty career stages as: (a) assistant professors with less than three years of experience, (b) assistant professors with more than three years of experience, (c) associate professors, (d) full professors with more than five years until retirement, and (e) full professors with less than five years until retirement.

The Agricultural and Extension Education Discipline

As a discipline, AEE impacts were amplified by the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, which allowed more access to higher education for people seeking specific training in agriculture and mechanics (Barrick, 1989; Duemer, 2007; Franz & Townson, 2008). These impacts were the foundation for today's efforts of AAE faculty. Barrick (1989) argued that faculty in the discipline are not solely "teacher education" or "extension education," but they are a combination that fall under the umbrella term "agricultural education" (p. 28).

The cultures in departments of agricultural education (inclusive of education, extension, leadership, communications, etc.) have been impacted by disciplinary norms, institutional cultures, and societal trends (Lumpkin, 2014). Whether tied to a land-grant university or not, faculty with careers focused on AEE continually strive to grow professionally and expand the impact of their work (Seevers & Graham, 2012). This growth mindset has been advanced and celebrated since the discipline's early foundations (Franz et al., 2015).

International Agricultural Extension Education

The Hatch Act of 1887 intertwined agricultural education and the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) to complete the task of producing and disseminating information to the people of the United States (Hillison, 1996). Although this foundation was honored through decades of work, AEE faculty members evolved the discipline to encompass other facets of specialties including agricultural communications, community development, and international agricultural education (Leeuwis, 2013; Shinn et al., 2009; Tucker et al., 2003). To contribute to this shifting focus, AEE faculty members developed the *Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education* (AIAEE) in 1984 (AIAEE, n.d.; Meaders, 2009). After ten years of discovery and growth of knowledge, AIAEE published the first issue of the *Journal of*

International Agricultural and Extension Education (JIAEE) in 1994. Since then, faculty have continued to research and expand their understanding of the various facets of international AEE, domestically and abroad, documenting discoveries in JIAEE and other outlets.

Epistemological Lens and Theoretical Perspective

We used constructionism as an epistemological lens to explore how three AEE faculty developed their expertise and built their professional identities through their career journeys (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism allows individuals to explore how they construct their own meanings through their experiences (Fosnot, 2013). Through a constructionism lens, knowledge is understood to be complex and nonlinear (Fosnot, 2013). Further, the construction of knowledge is influenced by interactions with others as they navigate various cultural, historical, and societal forces. As such, individuals' knowledge can be formed by their personal experiences and exposure to divergent viewpoints. In the current investigation, we maintained that our lived experiences in international agricultural and extension education were socially constructed and accentuated by key contextual forces. We also acknowledged that such contextual influences resulted from our interactions with individuals, events, and objects throughout our life history.

Because constructionism considers the learning and development of one's own experiences, we considered this an appropriate lens through which we could view our own as well as each other's experiences to make meaning. While this research is not focused on the learning of the researchers, it is argued that this type of *learning* is experienced each day as the faculty develop in their career with guidelines for promotion or tenure spurring growth (Camblin & Steger, 2000).

In addition to this lens, the idea of self-authorship assisted in the navigation of data and process of creating meaning. Self-authorship is "the internal capacity to define one's belief

system, identity, and relationships" (Baxter Magolda, 2007, p. 69). Through self-authorship principles, the researchers could rely on their own definitions, experiences, beliefs, personal and professional relationships to tell the story of their global scholar journey. Therefore, objects and relics from our storied past can hold diverse and conflicting meanings for individuals because they are socially constructed. However, shared meanings can also emerge as individuals engage in discourse and come to terms with how to interpret various objects, events, and traditions. In the current investigation, we used these lenses to place a particular emphasis on understanding how our life history has been shaped by events and experiences while also recognizing how such has been co-constructed and self-authored by various sociocultural forces in international agricultural and extension education.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to tell the stories of three international AEE faculty's journeys to embrace professional identities as global scholars. The objectives for this study were to:

1. Identify the individual personal journey and characteristics of each selected faculty member
2. Compare the individual perspectives to develop a multifaceted view of faculties' journey towards global scholarly identity

Methodology

Our investigation was grounded in Ellis' (2004) autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography is a study of the self; therefore, researchers use a range of personal artifacts and reflective tools to situate themselves within an issue or problem (Ellis, 2004). Further, this approach can be used to provide insight into "…multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural…" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). To accomplish such, Pratt (2015)

advocated for researchers to use personal items to provide a nuanced glimpse into their lived experiences. Then, through reflective analysis, they can assert how their experiences have been contextually situated and reified through their personal narratives (Pratt, 2015).

Reflexivity

Because the three researchers in this investigation served as data sources, it was critical to provide insight into our backgrounds. Lacey was a female assistant professor at New Mexico State University who had been in academia for two years and focused on agricultural communications and leadership. Lacey falls into the assistant professor with more than three years of experience career stage (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). Lacey has been active in fieldwork and has traveled abroad for multiple agricultural projects. Most of her international scholarship in the last two to three years has been focused on small research projects involving students. In prior years, however, her international scholarship was vigorous as she was involved with non-profit and government organizations working directly in agricultural settings abroad.

Richie was recently tenured and promoted to an Associate Professor at Louisiana State University and primarily focused on teacher preparation. Richie falls into the associate professor career stage (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). Richie's research agenda has concentrated on developing human capital and the capacity of individuals, domestically and globally, in the agricultural industry. He fulfills this focus by pursuing scholarship opportunities that examine how learning experiences and skill development opportunities in agriculture influence individuals' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and perspectives.

The final researcher, Grady, was a professor at the University of Florida who splits his focus between teacher preparation and global education. Grady falls into the full professor with more than five years until retirement career stage (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). His

international scholarship has focused on two related issues. The first has been to enhance the teaching abilities of university faculty and teachers. The second has been to improve the curriculum of educational institutions. This has involved working with faculty and institutions within the U.S. to better globalize their programs. It has also involved working with faculty and educational institutions abroad to improve their programs. This work has been funded through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). We recognize that our experiences and biases could have influenced how we narrated our stories.

Data Sources and Analysis

In the current study, the three investigators provided data. For example, the primary data sources were (a) a two-hour focus-group interview in which all three researchers used a semi-structured interview protocol to interview each other and (b) a reflective writing exercise. We also used artifacts from our past to triangulate the study's findings (Ellis, 2004). Those sources of data included: (a) curriculum vitae, (b) scholarly research, (c) research statements, and (d) teaching philosophies. It should be noted that the data sources should be understood as partial, fragmented, and co-constructed representations of ourselves that illuminate how we made sense of our position within the academic culture of international agricultural and extension education.

For data analysis, we employed Corbin's and Strauss' (2015) constant comparative method, which facilitated our use of three coding cycles: (a) open, (b) axial, and (c) selective. To facilitate our analysis, we used the Nvivo® qualitative analysis software. Open coding was inductive in which we analyzed all data sources line-by-line and noted emergent patterns (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Thereafter, we engaged in axial coding to scrutinize the open codes for similarities and then cluster them into categories of similar meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In

the final phase of analysis, selective coding, we further examined the categories and collapsed them through a systematic data reduction process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As a result, our findings emerged through three themes.

Ethics and Qualitative Quality

Ellis (2004) argued that to ensure qualitative quality in autoethnographic investigations, researchers should have an ethical commitment to a *triumvirate* of sources, including the author, reader, and story. Therefore, as authoethnographers, we sought to be attentive, ethically grounded, and self-reflexive throughout all phases of the study. We also drew upon Ellis' (2004) conception of *emotional recall* in which we attempted to "imagine being back in these experiences" (p. 675) to provide a layered glimpse into our lived experiences and tell our stories as authentically as possible.

Although this introspective process effectively emerged our narratives, some events and memories may not be precise and could have been recalled inaccurately. To address this limitation, we triangulated our memory work with personal artifacts to ensure our story was as accurate as possible (Ellis, 2004). We also want to be transparent that because the data provided in this investigation was our personal stories and no data was acquired from individuals considered conventional respondents, we were not required to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from our respective institutions. We were responsible for our personal narratives and maintained that no one else could tell them as accurately (Ellis, 2004).

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Findings

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Our autoethnographic account emerged through our analytic process as we sought to narrate our journey – (a) a forked path, (b) peaks and valleys, and (c) navigating beyond – to embrace our professional identities as global scholars in international AEE.

A Forked Path

When reflecting on our motivation to engage in international work, we recalled unique global experiences that piqued our interest during childhood. On this point, Lacey recalled: "my interest in international research and activities began as a senior in college. I come from a very small communities in rural west Texas...I grew up not knowing of the vast world that existed outside of my little Texas community." She continued: "From that trip [study abroad] on, my passion for international agriculture was solidified. I decided to pursue a master's degree in International Agriculture from Oklahoma State University which propelled me into a career of international agriculture experiences and research." Whereas Richie perceived his "international interest began as a child after my family took several mission trips to Mexico. This was the first time he recalled coming "face-to-face with poverty and food insecurity." In contrast, Grady was "raised in a military family and lived much of my childhood abroad. Because of this background, I think I always viewed the world as being very interconnected."

Despite having an early interest in international work, we had multiple *bumps* along our path to embracing global scholarship. For example, Grady explained that his mentor "discouraged getting involved [with international work]" during his graduate program because it could slow progress toward tenure and promotion. During his reflective writing, Grady explained that another "…initial barrier for me was a lack of awareness about international opportunities and connections for my work..." He continued: "…sustained work internationally in a particular location is typically built off of personal relationships. Building those relationships can be a barrier."

Meanwhile, Lacey talked about how her "international connections were zero" as a young faculty member, which made it difficult to find new projects. Lacey also explained that

"time" had been a major barrier to her pursing international work. She articulated: "I have been at two different programs [institutions of higher education] in two years. This doesn't give me a lot of time to get established and begin building my program." Lacey continued: "Since my moves, I feel as though I have been in more of a survival mode instead of a proactive mode where I can go out and make things happen… I often fe[lt] as though I will never get to take my international dreams off the backburner."

On the other hand, Richie maintained that "the biggest obstacle I have encountered in conducting international research has been negative attitudes toward global work and other cultures." Case in point, "recruiting students for study abroad programs and international experiences had been difficult because they have expressed little interest in visiting and learning about other countries." He continued: "multiple colleagues at my institution have turned me down when I have attempted to recruit them for an international project because they have "no interest" in international work. As a result, each of us encountered *a forked path* in which we could either choose to focus our efforts solely on domestic projects or begin to engage in international work more purposefully. Each of us chose the latter path.

Peaks and Valleys

After pursuing international work, we individually traversed numerous career *peaks and valleys* along our journeys. In particular, Lacey explained that some key highs of her international work were "…to bring examples from previous international experiences into the classroom…those experiences are deeply connected with my domestic work as I am in a formal classroom setting teaching various aspects of agricultural communication." Similarly, Grady explained: "My domestic and international work are intimately linked. I regularly use international examples in my teaching. My research includes a blend of data from within and

outside the U.S. I also look for opportunities to bring international graduate students into my program." Therefore, merging domestic and global work in international agricultural and extension education appeared to serve as a key source of meaning in our work that brought forth a sense of fulfillment.

Meaning in our work also emerged from achieving success through the "formation of international relationships" (Richie) and receiving support from mentors and peers. For example, Richie explained that being able to receive support from his mentors on his international endeavors helped him "feel like he was on the right path." Lacey also noted that having a department head who was engaged in international work, encouraged her view international scholarship opportunities as complementary to her career in academia rather than a setback. Grady also explained that forming a "go-to group" of peers when "we're putting some kind of weird idea together" helped him move his work forward. Further, he articulated that as a full professor he also found meaning through "both formally and informally mentoring, some of my junior colleagues" on ways to make their work have a more global impact. Therefore, our professional relationships and sources of support were identified as key *peaks* that encouraged us to continue to engage in global scholarship.

Despite this, we all experienced a challenge with "funding" our work early in our career – a phase Lacey mentioned she remained in as an early career professional. For instance, Richie explained that internal "faculty travel funding… that is just [is not] really available at Louisiana State University, we have some like you know, like classroom type grants that are only $1,000 but really nothing for international travel or projects." Therefore, funding often had to occur through more competitive funding opportunities such as NIFA or USAID. However, through persistence, Richie and Grady have found opportunities to have their international projects

funded. On this point, Grady explained how he began to achieve success: "I was finally able to secure some partners working [on] USAID funding. I was not in a position at that time to take the lead, so I was typically a Co-PI and took the lead on one small piece..."

Navigating Beyond

Although we were at different career phases, we shared similar goals and philosophies regarding how we intend to *navigate* future challenges and enact positive change. A common thread between our work was to "build capacity" across multiple contexts. Grady revealed:

> About 10 years ago, I had an epiphany about my work. First, I realized that the end goal for any of us working in agriculture (broadly) is that there is a safe and abundant food supply produced in a sustainable manner so that every person on this planet is food secure. Second, I realized how agricultural education fits into the larger ag/natural resources system – we are experts at building human capacity. Once these two things clicked, I found direction and purpose for my work.

We have each also pondered ways to expand international experiences to our students and populations we serve. As an illustration, Lacey explained that she hoped to build more global competency through creating "a virtual study abroad experience… we've got a really cool learning lab, like gaming lab, that has been funded." Through such experiences, she hopes that she can create more interest in international agriculture at New Mexico State University. Similarly, Richie saw value in facilitating critical social exchanges between international scholars and domestic U.S. students and professionals. He explained: "because of the negative attitudes toward individuals from other countries that I have experienced, my [future] work will largely focus on basic knowledge, acceptance, and understanding of individuals from other countries."

Moving forward, we also plan to address issues such as "global agricultural communications" (Lacey), "food insecurity, water scarcity, and disease" (Richie), and improve the dissemination of research by maintaining a "reputable journal with an international audience"

(Grady). In casting this speculative eye toward the future, we also hope to "expand our network" (Lacey) to impact individuals across the globe through agricultural and extension education. To this point, Lacey explained: "I dream of being able to build connections and sharing opportunities between students in my classrooms and international students and professionals. I believe these types of exchanges will have lasting effects…" Through the futuring of our work, therefore, we illuminated strategies and areas of focus that others might use to *navigate beyond* the challenges they may face as they seek to embrace an identity as a global scholar.

Discussion

We pulled several conclusions out of our three themes of: (a) a forked path, (b) peaks and valleys, and (c) navigating beyond. First, we all had international engagement early in our lives either as youth or as undergraduate students. Although this is not a requirement to be an engaged global scholar, it certainly provided motivation for the three of us seek out international engagement as professionals. Our early international experience was influential in the construction of our identities (Fosnot, 2013). Other international AEE faculty can seek out opportunities to provide international experiences for youth and undergraduate students so that we might help plant the seeds to develop the next generation of international AEE faculty.

Second, we all faced difficulties making initial connections with others working in international AEE. AIAEE serves as a community of like-minded scholars for all three of us, but only a small portion of our colleagues in our home departments are AIAEE members. The three of us also have felt the need to justify our international work with our colleagues who work exclusively on domestic issues. We faced challenges due to our disciplinary and department cultures, which is consistent with Lumpkin's (2014) work. Consequently, all three of us found success in linking our domestic and international work. AIAEE could more proactively help

members build connections with other AIAEE members. AIAEE could also develop some recruitment materials which would allow members to share international engagement opportunities with non-members.

Third, mentorship was important to all three of us, both in seeking mentors and in mentoring others. We all experienced ups and downs in our international engagement efforts. Our mentors helped us navigate the downs and celebrate the ups. As engaged international scholars, we also find ourselves mentoring students and other faculty. The importance of mentorship and mentoring across all career stages was noted by Baldwin and Blackburn (1981).

Fourth, we all have experienced challenges in securing funding to support our international work. We noted differences in internal funds available at our respective universities to support faculty international research and teaching, which is consistent with the Lumpkin's (2014) assertation of how university culture impacts faculty across career stages. Two of us have had some success in securing federal funds for a variety of international education and research projects. Collectively, we believe funding is a major barrier for U.S. faculty to engage internationally. Perhaps there is a role for AIAEE to play here. There could be professional development programs developed to help members learn how to write more competitive grant proposals. Additionally, AIAEE could more proactively create opportunities for members to link together to collaborate on grant proposals. Beyond AIAEE, graduate programs in AEE could provide better training for students as a part of their education.

Finally, we each had clear ideas about the intended impacts of our international education and research. We each described how we hope our work builds the capacity of others. However, we differed in the scope of who we are hoping to influence, which is consistent with differences observed across career stages by Baldwin and Blackburn (1981). The least experienced of us

described how she hopes her work impacts students. The mid-career member of our team described how his work facilitates interactions between professionals in AEE. Our more senior team member described how he is trying to move the whole profession.

Our research has obvious limitations. We are all American faculty working at U.S. universities, and our experiences may or may not be representative of other U.S. faculty and almost certainly different than non-U.S. faculty. This research could be replicated across different contexts and over time. Additionally, this research was conducted in the year following the Covid-19 pandemic, which greatly impacted international education and research efforts. Some of the things we noted may have been different before the pandemic and could look differently in the future. Longitudinal research could shed light into trends in AEE faculty development. Perhaps this is something AIAEE could facilitate.

Autoethnographic Reflections

Lacey

Throughout this research process, I found myself swarmed by contradictory feelings. I was excited to be a part of such an interesting topic but scared to show some of the more vulnerable thoughts that plague my mind as I navigate the world of academia. As a young academic, I often suffer from the widely known *imposter syndrome*. It can seem as though I will never stand out or become known for an impactful area of research. Link this with the pressures that form from tenure aspirations, and it can be debilitating. However, this process of research and reflection has brought comfort to the over-active mind I shift through daily. It was encouraging to find comradery with faculty with similar passions but vastly different paths. I found confidence in the midst of memoing after documenting some interesting and unique

projects from my past. By listening to my peers, I found inspiration to forge ahead with my passions knowing that goals and paths change over time. I simply must continue in my practice and be open to the opportunities that exist in the future.

Richie

I found that by engaging in the autoethnographic process, by which I employed various reflective and pre-flective approaches, I was able to make sense and draw exciting connections to others' academic journeys. For example, I have previously considered my academic work relatively unique and because I have an international focus toward my work, I have often struggled to draw parallels to others in my discipline. However, through this investigation, I was able to ponder more deeply what my journey meant and how others could use the lessons that I learned to enact positive change for present and future international AEE scholars.

Grady

I found participating in this research to be a great experience. I enjoyed learning more about my younger colleagues. Their individual journeys helped me reflect on my own journey and think about my own struggles and successes. I was reminded of the pressures of the promotion and tenure process and the challenges of building a teaching/research program as a relatively new faculty member. In the end, I am excited about the future of our field and the future of AIAEE with people like my coauthors coming behind us "old guard" to make a difference in international agricultural and extension education. Participating in this project also gave me new insights in how I can approach mentoring junior faculty and PhD students at my home institution.

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