



EXAMINING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PERCEPTION OF AGRICULTURE: VIEWS OF STUDENTS ATTENDING AN 1862 LAND-GRANT INSTITUTION

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INTRODUCTION

- Since the 1920's African American farmers have declined by 98% due to economic struggles, racial discrimination, and land loss (Wood & Gilbert, 1998).
- This alarming decline of minority owned farms has given researchers much reason to investigate how structural changes may have influenced this regression (Balvanz, et al., 2011).
- Historically minorities have participated less than whites in agricultural related careers outside of labor occupations (Talbert & Larke, 1995) and today, nearly two million of the principal farm operators in the United States are white males (USDA, 2007).
- Although African American farmers are beginning to see an increase in numbers they still represent less than one percent of the farmers in this country at 31,912 farms with African American principal operators (USDA, 2007).



INTRODUCTION CONT.

- This trend could possibly act as an example of Everett Roger's Diffusion of Innovation theory.
- According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is the process members of a society or social system use to communicate an innovation through particular channels over time amongst one another. "An innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. If an idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation" (Rogers, 2003, p. 12).
- The growing use of GMO's into agricultural techniques is a new innovation for many African American farmers and the lack of implementation amongst them could lead researchers to believe African American farmers could potentially be laggards.



PROBLEM

- According to the USDA (2007), African American farmers are growing at a higher percentage than farmers as a whole, the average age of the African American farmer is nearly 65 years old and represent less than one percent of principal farm operators.
- While we see an increase in numbers (USDA, 2007), the overall numbers are still dangerously low.
- Exploring the reason behind these low numbers could help in recruiting more minority students into agricultural education programs (Talbert & Larke, 1995), which could potentially help diversify the agriculture industry.



PURPOSE OF STUDY

- With the dwindling numbers of African Americans enrolled in agricultural-related fields (Morgan, 2000), this research will strive to learn more about the essence of the lived experiences of African American students and how these experiences influence their choosing of a major.
- Gaining insight to this information could help recruitment departments within agriculture programs at higher education institutions create new methods that may be more successful in obtaining a more diverse selection of students.
- This study will also serve to fill a gap in literature where there is not much information on what influences the choices of African Americans to pursue a career in Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the essence of the lived experiences of African American students who attend an 1862 Land Grant institution?
2. How do these lived experiences influence their career choice?
3. What reasons do African American young adults give concerning the pursuit of an agricultural career/ natural resources career?



SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

1. This study was limited to only the perceptions of the African American students attending Oklahoma State University, an 1890 Land Grant Institution.
2. The validity of this study is reduced because the results from this study can be transferrable but not generalized.
3. There will be potential for bias to be present on the part of the primary researcher but the researcher, as the primary instrument in this study, identified and watched possible biases closely to ensure they would not affect the accuracy of the results (Merriam, 2009).



ASSUMPTIONS

- The 1862 Land Grant Institution students interviewed will be willing to truthfully share the lived experiences that influenced their choice of major in an agricultural related science or a natural resources related science.



LITERATURE REVIEW

- Africans Transported to North America
- Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and 1890
- Discrimination by the U. S. Government
- Landloss in the African American Community
- Educational Influences
- New Farmers of America Merges with Future Farmers of America
- Diversity in Agricultural Education
- The Older Generation
- Theoretical Framework



LITERATURE REVIEW

- African Americans have been important historical contributors to agriculture (Moon, 2007), but the struggles of the African American farmer has been a relevant issue for decades (Brown, Dagher, & McDowell, 1992).
- “Agriculture has always been an essential function of human societies; in Africa, the varied climates and regions (desert, savannah, rain forests, mountains, river valleys, etc.) necessitated differing approaches to land cultivation” (Moon, 2007, p.2).



LITERATURE REVIEW CONT.

- In 1619, the first 20 Negroes arrived in Jamestown and were sold to the colonists as indentured servants (Johnson, Smith, & WGBH Series Research Team, 1998).
- In 1640, after escaping his master, John Punch was the first African American sentenced to serve his master for the rest of his life as a slave and overtime many other Virginia landowners saw the benefits of enslaving Africans (Johnson, et. al, 1998).
- The conclusion of the Civil War marked the end of slavery in the United States, and the number of African Americans farmers increased, reaching its peak in the 1920s (Browne, 2003).
- The promise given to African Americans at the end of slavery was that “40 acres and a mule” was to be given to freed slaves (Reynolds, 2002).



LITERATURE REVIEW CONT.

- Justin Morrill drafted an Act to create public schools that would give farmers and their counterparts, who may lack the means to attend the existing colleges, the opportunity to gain an education (Duemer, 2007; Morrill, 1874). This led to the creation of the 1862 Morrill Land Grant Act.
- Although Morrill did not make direct guidelines as it pertained to race, sex, or creed, when he created the Morrill Act of 1862 many African Americans were excluded from the opportunity to pursue degrees from these institutions, particularly in the south (Neyland, 1990). Even with opposition, four black land-grant schools emerged under the 1862 Act



LITERATURE REVIEW CONT.

- In 1872, Morrill presented a bill to Congress that would later become The Second Morrill Act of 1890 (Neyland, 1990). This Act was officially passed August 30, 1890 and allowed for the creation of state colleges for black students that would emphasis in the study of agriculture and mechanical arts (Reynolds, 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW CONT.

- Another influential move in African American agriculture was the merger of the New Farmers of America (NFA) with the Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization in the 1965 (Wakefield & Talbert, 1989).
- After NFA's merger with FFA there was a rapid decline in African Americans holding key leadership roles in agriculture, which is also speculated to have contributed to the decline a African American representation in agricultural science programs (Moore, 1994).
- Members of NFA also felt a great loss (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). Many saw the merger as more of an absorption deal instead of a joining of two entities.



LITERATURE REVIEW CONT.

- With most African American farmers averaging around 60 years of age old there is an apparent lack of representation of African American youth in the agriculture industry (USDA, 2007).
- According to Morgan (2000), there were only 4,209 African American students enrolled in an agriculturally related science.
- In a study out of Texas, Douglas Lavergne, Wash Jones and Alvin Larke Jr. (2012), found that many of the students enrolled in agriscience classes had white teachers. So, if literature suggests students need an to see people of their ethnicity in leadership roles in order to encourage them to pursue specific careers, then the teachers in place must be knowledgeable on how to help diverse students succeed in this field.
- Dr. Charles Magee, a professor and director of biological and agricultural systems engineering at Florida A&M University expressed the idea that if African Americans saw more images of themselves on agricultural products then they may be more eager to learn more about the industry (Morgan, 2000).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- The theoretical framework works as the underlying structure of the research and it also serves as a frame of a study (Merriam, 2009).
- The Expectancy-Value (E-V) theory is typically used by researchers to explore the different aspects individuals have when valuing academics. With this theory, researchers can also examine what the individuals expect as far as success and how this will add to their accomplishment behaviors (DeBacker & Nelson, 1999).
- “Expectancy refers to an individual’s belief that he or she can perform a task (I can do this): his or her belief in expectancy for success. Value refers to the significance or importance of the task for the individual to choose to perform” (Clark, 2013, p. 38).
- This theory was derived from John Atkinson’s expectancy value model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).



METHODOLOGY

- Phenomenology emphasizes on lived experiences and interpretation (Merriam, 2009). It gives researchers the opportunity to examine human experiences from the perspective of the subjects of a study (Creswell, 1994).
- The number of African Americans choosing to study agricultural related studies are considerably small (Burns, 2006), so the African American students who are choosing to study agriculture sciences are displaying an interesting phenomenon.



PHENOMENOLOGY

- In phenomenology studies, what emerges in consciousness is the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), and the primary concern of the researcher is to expose the first hand experience of an individual from their perspectives (Lester, 2005).



PHENOMENOLGY

- A transcendental phenomenological approach was used for this study and this approach “engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the Epoche process)” (Moustakas, 1994, p.22).
- Tracy’s eight criteria to ensure high quality qualitative research are as follows: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010).



POPULATION

- The target population of this study was African American students between the ages of 18 and 25 who attended Oklahoma State University and studied in College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR).
- After recruiting subjects through emails and snowball sampling I obtained nine participants, all of which were undergraduate students.
- Five were male and four were female.



PARTICIPANTS

Table 1

Summary of Participants



Participant's Pseudonym	Major	Special Comments
Ricky	Landscape Architecture	Grew up in a rural area, with no AG BG. Persuaded to join AG by another AA in the same industry.
Kasey	Animal Science	Grew up in the downtown area and her family farm first introduced her to AG.
Taylor	Animal Science	Grew up in the city with no AG BG, and rarely seeing AA veterinarians persuaded her to join AG.
Kenny	Agribusiness	Grew up in fairly small town. Family farm first exposed him to AG.
Eddie	Agriculture Management	Grew up in a rural area. First exposed to AG through family's farm.
Cassie	Animal Science	Grew up in a rural area. Heavily involved in AG during HS.
Derek	Animal Science	Grew up in the city. Heavily involved in AG during HS.
Destiny	Animal Science	Grew up in fairly small town with no AG BG. Love of animals drove her to join AG.
Robert	Agriculture Education	Grew up in a rural area on his family's farm. Strong AG BG. Lack of AA AG teachers persuaded him to join AG.

Note: AA= African Americans; AG= Agriculture; BG= Background



DATA COLLECTION

- Face-to face interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes were held with each participant individually (Creswell, 1994).
- All of the interviews were held in conference rooms on the Oklahoma State University campus. The interviews INCLUDED open-ended questions allowing (Merriam, 2009).
- The interviews were recorded with an iPhone ® using a downloadable digital recording application.



DATA COLLECTION

- After all of the interviews were conducted and recorded, I transcribed each interview using *Express Scribe*, a computer transcription software.



DATA ANALYSIS

- I analyzed my data using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam Method.
- I started by going through each transcript and further familiarized myself with the participants and their experiences by creating lists and preliminary groups (Moustakas, 1994).
- I used *Atlas.ti.v.7* to help me create codes for all of the significant statements throughout the transcripts and keep them all organized.



FINDINGS

- Found: 146 significant statements under 35 codes, and 6 themes emerged.
- Theme 1: Positive Experiences or Influences Drive Decision to Join Agriculture
- Theme 2: The Desire for African American Students to Create Change Strengthens the Pursuit of an Agriculturally Related Degree
- Theme 3: Historical Hurt and Lack of Encouragement Contribute to Low Numbers of African Americans in Agriculture
- Theme 4: Going Back, Creating Programs, and Early Exposure for African American Youth Can Increase Their Involvement in Agriculture
- Theme 5: Positive Affects and Feelings Experienced While Involved in Agriculture
- Theme 6: Negative Affects and Feelings Experienced While Involved in Agriculture



Theme 1: Positive Experiences or Influences Drives Decision to Join Agriculture

- Overall the participants were drawn to agriculture because of their exposure to the industry or the influence of someone who was already involved in agriculture.
- It was actually really fun, because I got to milk a cow for the first time and then I was like, “I really want to do this when I grow up”, so that’s kind of when I was like I want to be a vet, because I was hoping to administer medication to the cows. And we found out that a cow was pregnant, so I got to watch her give birth when the time came. So I was like this is kind of where I want to be when I get older [KASE;35-39].



Theme 1: Positive Experiences or Influences Drive Decision to Join Agriculture

- “Really I actually went to the AG business, AG College and just kind of spoke with some of the advisors there and my advisor now Matt Johnson he actually, really is the one who influenced me to go ahead and make the switch” [KENN;60-62].
- Because I was trying to choose between a pharmacists and a landscape architect. I found out that, I guess I could say my idols, Eddie George, he’s a famous Ohio State football player and he also became a landscape architect, so I was like, oh that’s cool so I might as well do that [RICK;102-105].



Theme 2: The Desire for African American Students to Create Change Strengthens the Pursuit of an Agriculturally Related Degree

- During the interviews with my participants many of them discussed their desire to create a change. Many of the participants were also driven to pursue agricultural related degrees because of the lack of African Americans present in the industry.



Theme 2: The Desire for African American Students to Create Change Strengthens the Pursuit of an Agriculturally Related Degree

- After going to all the vets in my neighborhood there's nothing but white vets. I don't have anything against them I know it's not their problem that they feel this way or whatever but I just feel there's something that we need to change [TAYL;225-227].
- The fact that there's not many African Americans in agriculture and uh to narrow it down in the field of agriculture education uh teaching high school students uh the year I graduated high school we did some research in there was only two African American agriculture teachers in the entire state of Oklahoma. And I was appalled at the findings that we found. And that was the first thing that really got me wanting to become an agriculture education teacher teaching, high school students [ROBE; 36-42].



Theme 2: The Desire for African American Students to Create Change Strengthens the Pursuit of an Agriculturally Related Degree

- It'd just be cool to see black people stand up and actually make a difference on a global scale. And AG definitely has the capabilities of impacting the world on a global scale so just to see black people involved with that. And actually making the effort to change things and make things better would really really be really cool [KENN; 185-198].



Theme 3: Historical Hurts and Lack of Encouragement Contribute to Low Numbers of African Americans in Agriculture

- All of the participants were asked the question, “Why aren’t more African Americans pursuing agricultural careers?” Everyone shared their thoughts and an array of ideas were repeated throughout all of the responses.
- “Maybe like the older generations like their parents or grandparents, maybe they kind of see how if they work on farms its kind of like the slavery days. But, that’s kind of how I feel” [DEST;147-149].
- “There’s many jobs you can do, you can have from AG. It’s just learning and then knowing what AG can provide for you. A lot of people might not know what the job AG can provide for other people” [EDDI;393-394].



Theme 3: Historical Hurts and Lack of Encouragement Contribute to Low Numbers of African Americans in Agriculture

- I feel like people are inspired by other people so if I see somebody, like people always want to be rappers and basketball players because they know you can do it, black people are accepted and they seem them every day. But you never really see anyone in the AG industry so you're just like I don't think I can make it why try, let's go for something easier [KASE;209-213].



Theme 4: Going Back, Creating Programs, and Early Exposure for African American Youth Can Increase Their Involvement in Agriculture

- As the conversations progressed we discussed some of the ways we could encourage more African Americans to join the agriculture industry.
- You know once you actually have contact with it and actually can have access to it you can actually see this is what I can do and this is where I can go with it so if you were able to put programs in place or like OSU had outlet programs like for historically black high schools or whatever and actually had people speak on AG and make them realize that those not just farming then you could definitely see a change. Things could definitely pick up for black people in AG [KENN; 141-146].



Theme 4: Going Back, Creating Programs, and Early Exposure for African American Youth Can Increase Their Involvement in Agriculture

- Like the people who are in AG now, in school, people like us in our classes, then if we succeed and show people. We have to be outspoken about our success, not like bragging about it, but just showing our younger people that they can do it to. Like if we got here you can get here, it may be hard but nothing is easy. I feel like when people succeed in their field other people will follow [KASE; 230-234].



Theme 5: Positive Affects and Feelings Experienced While Involved in Agriculture

- During their time in the agriculture field these students have experienced many things.
- “But all the students in my animal science class are really really nice. They’re not like the racist type or looking at me in a funny way or anything like that” [TAYL; 215-217].
- Um, and then, for a while there like I was going on the wrong path, and then FFA said “hey if you’re going to be something you know you’re going to have to do it, you going to have to be something better than what you’re doing”, so that helped me out a lot [CASS;58-61].



Theme 6: Negative Affects and Feelings Experienced While Involved in Agriculture

- It's been pretty overwhelming because I've never been in the AG field and then all the kids here, like half the kids in my class have grown up on farms so they know what its like and they already have experience from childhood [DESI;122-124].
- “You don't really have anybody to run to sometimes” [RICKI;138] and, “You don't have anybody to relate to” [RICKI;143].
- “I kind of lost a few friendships from my black friends because of being involved in the agriculture industry” [DERE;143-144].



ESSENCE

- The essence is the overall structure of an experience (Merriam, 2009).
- The essence of this study was all of the participants have gone against the grain and joined the agriculture industry, although they may have faced many challenges and emotions of exclusion or judgment. Their desire to make a difference is what has helped motivate them to remain persistent, along with the hopes of helping to encourage other African Americans one day.



SUGGESTIONS

- It could prove to be helpful in recruitment efforts if universities and colleges created more agriculture programs to be brought into areas that are heavily populated by African American youth, including but not limited to schools and neighborhoods.
- Since change seems to drive many of these participants it would be interesting to see the implementation of an educational course at Oklahoma State University, whether it be general history courses or an agriculture course, that highlights African Americans who have made a significant impact in the industry.
- It would also be beneficial if more of the agriculture companies and industries showed African Americans participating in the industry. Making these images more available may help African American youth see the kind of jobs they could have if they chose agriculture as a career.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further research should be conducted, to examine the difference between African American students who chose to pursue agriculture versus those who chose other majors. The dialogue between the two of them could help provide more information as to why the numbers of African Americans involved in agriculture are so small.
- Moreover, Studies should be conducted to look into the existing programs that are created to help promote agriculture to African American youth. Studying the students involved in these programs could help researchers learn the effectiveness of these programs in recruiting diversity.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further research should examine the experiences of African Americans involved in agriculture programs that are predominantly black. Researching this could reveal the differences between students who are constantly surrounded by people who look like them and see if this positively affects their success rates.



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Thank You!

