

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

By

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Abstract: Shortly after the Civil War, the numbers of African Americans involved in agriculture began to dwindle. Although recently an increase has occurred in African-American farmers in the United States, the overall numbers are low. This phenomenological qualitative study examined the lived experiences among nine African-American students choosing to pursue an agricultural-related degree at an 1862 land-grant institution, Oklahoma State University. Individual interviews were conducted, and each participant was asked about their experiences related to being an African American studying agriculture today. The drive to diversify the agriculture industry is becoming more important and this study peered into the lives of students who made the decision to enter this industry and documents their experiences and influences. Six themes were found during this study, which showed the perceptions and thoughts of the nine participants. Overall, the participants' experiences while involved in agriculture revealed how African-American history has affected the number of African Americans pursuing careers in agriculture today. The results also opened up many new areas where research can be conducted to help promote diversity in agriculture. Learning the motivations of the African-American students choosing agricultural-related majors helped expose layers of nuance and complexity comprising this phenomenon.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

In the 1900s, the time period shortly after the Reconstruction Era in the United States of America (Browne, 2003), nearly 1 million African-American farmers owned an estimated 15 million acres of land (Grant, Wood, & Wright, 2012). At that time, African-Americans represented more than 13% of all farmers nationwide (Browne, 2003). Since 1920, the number of African-American farmers has declined by 98% due to economic struggles, racial discrimination, and land loss (Wood & Gilbert, 2000). Minority-owned farms declined at a rate of 91% from 1954 to 1987, while White-owned farms declined at a rate of 55% during the same time (Balvanz et al. 2011). This alarming decline of minority-owned farms gave researchers many reasons to investigate how structural changes may have influenced this regression (Balvanz et al., 2011).

Today, the U.S. has 2.1 million farms, less than 1% of the United States' population declares farming as its primary occupation (United States Department of Agriculture, 2012) and 90% of these farmers get the majority of their household

income from sources outside of farming (Lobao & Meyer, 2001). “The decline in the number of Black (and White) farmers continued throughout the twentieth century, even as agriculture became the domain of large corporate interests” (Moon, 2007, p. 9); the USDA, however, offered programs to assist African-American farmers in establishing and creating strong cooperative businesses that would increase the returns of their farms (Reynolds, 2002). Many farmers use other sources of income to support themselves and the number of American farmers is on the decline, but, the numbers also reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the agricultural industry is growing throughout the nation (USDA, 2012).

Historically, minorities have participated less than Whites in agriculturally related careers outside of labor occupations (Talbert & Larke, 1995). Today, nearly 2 million of the principal farm operators in the United States are White males (USDA, 2012). “The number of principal operators of all races and ethnic backgrounds has increased 4% since 2002, but the number of non-White operators has outpaced this overall growth” (USDA, 2007, para. 3). The number of African-American farmers grew 9% since 2002, surpassing the 7% growth rate of all U.S farmers (USDA, 2007), but the overall number of African-American farmers is still low.

Although African-American farmers are beginning to see an increase in numbers, they still represent less than 2% of the farmers in United States with ownership of 33,471 farms and ranches (USDA, 2012). The bulk of African-American-operated farms are located in the southern region of the United States (USDA, 2012). When compared to other farmers in the United States, farms with African Americans as principal operators

tend to be smaller in size and generate less in sales than other farms across the nation (USDA, 2007).

“African American farmers are historically important contributors to agriculture in the United States” (Balvanz et al., 2011, p. 68), but today, the number of African Americans involved in agriculture represents a very small percentage of the total (USDA, 2012). Balvanz et al. (2011) explained:

African Americans face institutional and social discrimination. The deleterious effects of discriminatory practices continue to be barriers to maintaining the family farm. Discriminatory lending is associated with farmland loss, such that the number of African American farmers in the United States has been falling at a much higher rate than that of White farmers. (p. 68)

After the Civil War, many African Americans chose the farming lifestyle because they perceived they had strong expertise in agriculture, but with the lack of land and capital, many were forced to become sharecroppers, which became a negative experience for many African-American farmers (Brown, Christy, & Gebremedhin, 1994). A contributing factor to the decline of African-American representation in agriculture is due to the rapid use of genetically modified organisms and big production agriculture causing African Americans to struggle financially (Morgan, 2000; Pennick, 2011). The USDA also encouraged better farming practices by substituting human experience with technology and science (Daniel, 2007). Although African Americans may want to use the more traditional seed practices or try organic techniques, their constant state of survival and the lack of funding for the new alternative practices keep them under the thumb of corporate agriculture (Pennick, 2011).

Nonetheless, 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 they represent less than 1% of principal farm operators. Moon (2007) said the idea of African-American farmers representing such a small percentage of American farmers is a problem for African Americans.

“John Boyd of Mecklinburg County, Virginia, head of the National Black Farmers Association, is quoted as saying that if the current trends are not reversed, farming, which was Blacks’ first occupation in America, ‘is going to be the first occupation to become extinct for Black people.’” (pp. 10-11)

While a slight increase in recent numbers (USDA, 2012), and a slight reversal of the trend Boyd described has occurred, the overall numbers are still low. Collaborations among 1890 land-grant colleges, The Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, and other organizations are being pursued to help educate African Americans on the history and struggles of African-American farming and the significance of keeping agriculture alive within the African-American community (Moon, 2007). Many advocates recognize African-American farmers face specific barriers and have started organizations to address their needs, organizations’ whose sole purpose is to expose inner-city African-American youth to the agricultural industry (Grant et al, 2012).

Talbert and Larke (1995) found many African-American students who study agricultural-related areas to have less of a rural background than White students. Addressing this difference could help in recruiting more minority students into agricultural education programs (Talbert & Larke, 1995), which would potentially help diversify agriculture within al-related areas of higher education.

Statement of the Problem

A paucity of literature exists to explain why African Americans choose agricultural careers. The problem this study addressed was the actuality that researchers do not know why African Americans are not choosing to pursue agricultural-related careers. Examining the lived experiences of African-American students who chose to pursue agricultural-related careers could give insight into this problem.

Purpose of Study

With the low numbers of African Americans enrolled in agricultural-related fields (Morgan, 2000), this research study examines the essence of the lived experiences of African-American students and how these experiences influenced the students' choices of college majors.

Significance of Study

Gaining insight to this phenomenon could help recruitment departments within agricultural programs at higher education institutions create new methods that may be more successful in obtaining a more diverse of student body. This study also will serve to fill a gap in literature where is not much information exists on what influences the choices of African Americans to pursue a career in agricultural sciences and natural resources.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

1. What was the essence of the lived experiences of African-American students who attend Oklahoma State University, an 1862 land-grant institution?
2. How do these lived experiences influence the career choices of these students?

Scope

This study was limited to the perceptions of the African-American students attending Oklahoma State University, an 1862 land-grant institution during the 2013-2014 academic year.

Limitations

The following limitations were identified in this study:

1. The results from this study are transferrable but cannot be generalized.
2. The potential for bias existed on the part of the primary researcher, but the researcher, as the primary instrument in this study, identified and monitored possible biases closely to ensure they would not affect the accuracy of the results (Merriam, 2009).

Assumption

The students interviewed were truthful in sharing the lived experiences that influenced their choice to pursue a major in an agricultural-related science or a natural resources-related science.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Farm — “a tract of land, usually with a house, barn, silo, etc., on which crops and often livestock are raised for livelihood; land or water devoted to the raising of animals, fish, plants, etc.; a similar, usually commercial, site where a product is manufactured or cultivated” (Dictionary, 2014, farm)

Indentured servant — “a person who came to America and was placed under contract to work for another over a period of time, usually seven years, especially during the 17th to 19th centuries” (Dictionary, 2014, indentured servant)

Rural — “of, pertaining to, or characteristic of the country, country life, or country people; rustic” (Dictionary, 2014, rural)

Slave — “a person who is the property of and wholly subject to another; a bond servant” (Dictionary, 2014, slave)

Suburb — “a town or other area where people live in houses near a larger city” (Dictionary, 2014, suburb)

Urban — “of, pertaining to, or designating a city or town, living in a city, characteristic of or accustomed to cities; citified” (Dictionary, 2014, urban)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

To seek understanding concerning the small percentage of African Americans involved in the agricultural industry, the history of African Americans in agriculture must be explored. African Americans have been important historical contributors to agriculture (Moon, 2007). However, the struggles of the African-American farmer have 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), and the skills learned there were helpful to the Africans brought to the New World. The year 1619 was the start of African enslavement and the beginning of “African-American agriculture” (Moon, 2007). White landowners often would look to African slave farmers to help improve production of crops, crop cultivation, and animal husbandry practices (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). As Moon (2007) stated, during the slavery era:

The majority of enslaved Africans were put to work in agricultural settings, primarily in the southern region of the colonies/states, where they provided

unpaid labor producing large quantities of food and cash crops, including cotton, tobacco, and sugar. As a result, the landowners/slaveowners profited immensely, and by extension, the American economy in both domestic and international markets. (p. 3)

Africans Transported to North America

In the spring of 1607, three vessels operated by more than 100 colonists landed on the borders of Virginia's wilderness; they named this location Jamestown (Johnson, Smith, & WGBH Series Research Team, 1998). These men had hopes of building the first English settlement in the New World (Johnson et al., 1998). Settling in Jamestown was an important business venture for the English settlers, but they struggled to maintain the land and cultivate the crops needed to sustain life and their livelihood (Johnson et al., 1998). The men of the New World had two choices to help combat this issue: (1) bring families and communities from England to work the farms and businesses, possibly hiring a couple of hands to help or (2) exploit the lower classes of England and their desperation to have an opportunity to see the New World and the opportunities it had to offer (Johnson et al., 1998).

The Virginia settlers chose to persuade lower-class citizens of England to come to the New World; those citizens became indentured servants, contracted to work for four to seven years while they were given shelter, food, and clothes in exchange for their labor (Johnson et al., 1998). Although the drive for profit continued to grow, the treatment of indentured servants became more brutal and harsh; after 15 years, only 2,000 of the 15,000 people transported to Virginia in 1607 were still alive (Johnson et al., 1998).

In 1619, the first 20 Negroes arrived in Jamestown and were sold to the colonists as indentured servants (Fishel & Quarels, 1976; Johnson et al., 1998). At this time, Black and White servants were equally oppressed, but during the mid-seventeenth century this began to change and it was wrong to have darker skin (Johnson et al., 1998). One of the causes of this shift was the fact many indentured servants' contracts were not honored and they would rebel; the best way for the colonists to address this problem was to turn the Black and White servants against each other and prevent potential alliances (Johnson et al., 1998). In 1640, after escaping his master, John Punch was the first African in America sentenced to serve his master for the rest of his life as a slave (Fishel & Quarels, 1976), and overtime many other Virginia landowners saw the benefits of enslaving Africans (Johnson et al., 1998).

Massachusetts became the first English Colony to recognize slavery as a legal institution in 1641 (Johnson et al., 1998). "By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century [sic], the economic future of the new colonies would be tied to the buying, selling, and maintenance of Black people, bred to be lifelong slaves of Whites" (Johnson et al., 1998, p. 48). The number of African slaves in America more than quadrupled during the 1700s (Harris, 1992), showing the growing importance of slavery in America. Slaves worked on large plantations in agricultural settings where they would tend rice, tobacco, cotton, and other crops (Johnson et al., 1998). The presence of African slaves was largely in the southern region of the United States (Moon, 2007).

Life After Slavery in America

The conclusion of the American Civil War marked the end of legal slavery in the United States, and the number of free African-American farmers increased, reaching its

peak in the early 1900s (Browne, 2003). During this time, certain laws and actions hindered many of the newly freed slaves; the Black Codes, established in 1865, were implemented to continue the control of free Blacks located in the South and to ensure plantations kept a strong labor force (Cooper, 1995). “In political discussions during and after Reconstruction freedpeople consistently said they deserved southern land because their labor had made it valuable” (Ownby, 2003, p. 27). 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). When President Andrew Johnson came into office, he terminated most of the small-farm initiatives for freed slaves, preventing this promise from materializing in the way it was intended (Reynolds, 2002). The result was a changed system known as tenant farming or sharecropping (Moon, 2007).

“Under a typical sharecropping agreement, the Black farmer rented several acres of land and paid the owner a portion of the crop, usually about one-half” (Marable, 1979, p. 143). The system of sharecropping kept many African Americans in constant debt to their landlords and their acquired land would often be substantially smaller in size when compared to the White landowners (Brown et al., 1994). The earnings of African-American sharecroppers were inadequate to sustain a comfortable way of living (Hornsby, 2010). An example of the difficult work conditions of Black farmers post-emancipation was the land-to-labor ratio. The ratio used on sugar plantations was for every seven acres there was one Black worker to tend to the land (Hornsby, 2010).

The peak of land ownership among African Americans was during the early 1900s (Browne, 2003), and, during this time, land ownership was a symbol of hope for many African Americans (Merem, 2006). The concept of land ownership equated to the

Jeffersonian notion (Merem, 2006). If land is owned, then one has gained economic independence and political equality (Merem, 2006). The positivity and encouragement land ownership brought to the African-American community further proved its importance (Browne, 2003).

Black land ownership grew substantially in the early 1900s reaching its peak in 1910. Many African-American landowners acquired land through business deals they made with Whites, but, across a span of 80 years, African Americans lost more than 10 million acres of land, dropping from 15 million acres to more than 2 million acres (Browne, 2003). Edmund Merem (2006) assessed the issue of land loss and landlessness within the African-American farming community in his article, “The Loss of Agricultural Land Among Black Farmers.” He analyzed three case studies from Texas and literature that pertains to African-American land loss. He also discussed government initiatives that greatly affected African-American farmers (Merem, 2006).

Many African-American farmers did not receive the correct information needed to capitalize on government programs designed to help them (Merem, 2006). According to Merem (2006), lack of knowledge on farm policies and programs created more financial issues. He also found “the current institutional set up overseeing agricultural land use and rural affairs favored big corporate farms over small family farms associated with Black farmers” (Merem, 2006, p. 98).

Most African-American farmers are located in the South, but on average they had the smallest amount of acreage among other farmers (Merem, 2006). Merem (2006) also explained the changing demographics of African-American farmers. There is a lack of Black youth exists in the agricultural industry and “those under 25 represent only 0.4

percent among the region's African American farmers" (Merem, 2006, p. 93). Some Blacks fear the African-American heritage of farming may be lost if the youth continue to stray away from this field (Balvanz et al, 2011).

The lack of success on Black farms in the past could be because of the lack of development of managerial skills during the slavery era (Brown et al., 1994). Because education was not offered to African Americans, during slavery, they were already at a disadvantage (Brown et al., 1994). After the Civil War, educating African-American children was a struggle in the Northern and Southern regions (Fishel & Quarels, 1976). Deciding whether African Americans and Whites should be schooled together was a prominent issue (Fishel & Quarels, 1976) and "In the pivotal case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racially separate facilities, if equal, did not violate the Constitution. Segregation, the Court said, was not discrimination" (National Museum of History, 2014, para. 2). However, this case founded the separate but equal doctrine, which would live to fuel the sanction to oppress and racially discriminate against African Americans (Neyland, 1990).

Morrill Land Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890

Justin S. Morrill was a Congressional Representative for Vermont from 1854 through 1866 and was elected to the U.S. Senate, serving that body until his death (Duemer, 2007). While Morrill served in Congress, most of his initiatives were focused on creating better ways to use public lands (Duemer, 2007). He also wanted to help the education system because he perceived "the current state of educational facilities were inadequate to meet the needs of the mechanical arts" (Duemer, 2007, p. 136). Morrill drafted an Act to help solve this problem. He wanted 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).

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; those four schools were Hampton University in Virginia, Kentucky State University, Alcorn State University in Mississippi, and Claflin University in South Carolina (Neyland, 1990).

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, — 28 years after the passing of the original Morrill Land Grant Act — and allowed for the creation of state colleges for Black students would study agriculture and mechanical arts (Reynolds, 2002). When African Americans were allotted the opportunity to pursue an education and establish institutions of education, conflict occurred between whether to create a curriculum to continue to develop practical skills and trades or a curriculum that would stress liberal arts and classical approaches (Moon, 2007).

Following the end of slavery, a slight resistance existed among African Americans to study agriculture after they were freed (Moon, 2007). This issue continued after the passing of the 1890 Act. Many southern African Americans did not find the idea of attending a land-grant college appealing. The horrors of the past seemed to still linger and “their history of exploitation during slavery and slavery’s aftermath had taken the

dignity and respect out of agricultural and mechanical occupational pursuits” (Neyland, 1990, p. 21).

Another trend that occurred during the 1890s was that many African Americans made the move from the rural countryside to the city (Harris, 1992). This migration influenced more African Americans to leave agricultural jobs and gravitate toward industrial work (Harris, 1992). “From 1910 to 1920, more than half a million African Americans left the South, with the largest numbers migrating in a three-year span, 1916-19, in what has been called the Great Migration” (Harris, 1992, p. 36). Not only were African Americans leaving the rural south for the northern region, but also they were moving to the urban South (Harris, 1992). During this time, a few influential African-American writers emerged to help the efforts of promoting agriculture among their people (Ownby, 2003). One of these influential writers was Booker T. Washington, who helped develop Tuskegee University, a historically Black university with strong agricultural roots (Ownby, 2003). He “believed all Black southerners needed to know how to work on a farm. He idealized the skills of subsistence farming and urged people to use them to escape poverty” (Ownby, 2003, p. 34).

Shortly after the Great Migration, an organization was created to promote agriculture among Blacks in 1927 and became a national organization for African-American young men in 1935; this organization was called the New Farmers of America (NFA) (National FFA Organization, 2013). NFA was created by three men: Dr. H. O. Sargent, a federal agent for agricultural education in the U.S. Office of Education; George W. Owens, also known as the Father of NFA, who was a teacher-trainer at

Virginia State College, and J. R. Thomas, another-teacher trainer at Virginia State College.

The New Farmers of America (NFA) was an organization of Negro farm boys studying vocational agriculture in the public schools throughout 18 states in the eastern and southern United States ... The NFA was an organization designed to develop the qualities of leadership and citizenship of its members by allowing them to participate in conducting meetings, sharing in carrying out the program of activities of the chapter, and serving on committees (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001, p. 47)

NFA originated in Virginia and reached its peak of active membership in 1963 with 58,132 members (National FFA Organization, 2013). 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 1965 (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001). NFA was a prospering organization before the 1960s merger with FFA (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001). The *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case of 1954 was a key factor in the NFA/FFA merger. In this case, the “U.S. Supreme Court overturns Plessy v. Ferguson, ruling that the doctrine of separate but equal violates the 14th Amendment guarantee of equal protection” (National Museum of History, 2014, para. 22). *Brown v. Board of Education* forced integration in U.S. schooling systems (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001). When NFA merged with FFA in 1965, NFA contributed 52,000 members to the 454,000 FFA members (Bender, Taylor, Hansen, & Newcomb, 1979). Today, 579,678 members comprise the National FFA Organization but, only 8% of the members are African American (National FFA Organization, 2013).

After NFA's merger with FFA, a rapid decline in African Americans holding key leadership roles in agriculture occurred, which is speculated to have contributed to the decline of African-American representation in agricultural science programs (Moore, 1994). To evaluate the affects of the NFA/FFA merger on the impacted population, Dexter Wakefield and B. Allen Talbert conducted a study that shared the voices of the past members of NFA in "A Historical Narrative On the Impact of the New Farmers of America (NFA) On Selected Past Members." The objectives of their study were to determine what NFA activities contributed to or distracted members from gaining success, how influential the NFA was versus other factors on the leadership development of members, the aspects NFA lost during the merger, and if lost aspects could be incorporated into the FFA to address particular minority concerns (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003).

Wakefield and Talbert (2001) used the interviews from recorded historical narratives to gain the information needed to accomplish the objectives of that study. Although findings cannot be generalized as it applies to other NFA members, the findings exposed the significance of NFA to African-American agriculturists (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001). The participants said their involvement in NFA contributed to the development of their leadership (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). They said few African Americans held leadership positions in FFA after the merger and it became more difficult for African Americans to fall into new leadership positions in the future (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003). Participants said they believed this lack of leadership led to poor morale among Black students involved in FFA (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003).

Wakefield and Talbert found teachers involved in agriculture at the time of the NFA would travel to many of the students' homes, working with them and working with adults, allowing them to get involved with and see what was going on inside of the NFA (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001). Their efforts would help African Americans learn more about the opportunities NFA had to offer, and the community really valued the organization (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001).

After the merger, the morale of the African Americans involved in NFA dropped, and they perceived a great loss (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001). Many saw the merger as more of an absorption deal instead of a joining of two entities. Many of the African-American teachers were paid less and did not have the same voice in the classrooms as White agriculture teachers (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001). The loss of the connection between the African-American leaders in agriculture and the students had a huge impact; this was apparent because the first African-American president of FFA was elected 20 years after the merger (Wakefield & Talbert, 2001).

The fight for Civil Rights among African Americans revealed discrimination enforced by the U.S. government. Poor Whites and African Americans had no voice in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) during the Civil Rights Era; White farmers also lost land during the Civil Rights era, and African-American farmers lost land while simultaneously enduring intense racial discrimination from the USDA (Daniel, 2007). Many African-American farmers expressed their experiences of constant discrimination from the USDA; "the common complaint was that Black farmers had been purposely driven into bankruptcy through discriminatory procedures of the Farm Service Agency and the local farmer committees that approved USDA entry" (Browne, 2003, p.

145). Another impediment in American agriculture for African Americans were the programs created with President Roosevelt's New Deal (Hinson & Robinson, 2008); "The power of the white elite created a complex, and invisible set of connections from the USDA to county and local agricultural committees, and became entrenched both bureaucratically and socially" (Hinson & Robinson, 2008, p. 290).

Throughout the 1900s, African Americans were discouraged from applying for loans, numbers on their farm plans were altered, promised funding never came, and their equipment was over-evaluated (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). When many African-American farmers would not receive funding or assistance, their land would be sold or foreclosed upon (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). Examples such as these further supported Brown, Dagher and McDowell's (1992) findings that past agricultural policies were major contributing factors to the overall historical decline of African-American farmers.

During the 1990s, Congress took notice to the challenges African Americans faced and created the Land Loss Prevention Project (Merem, 2006). The Information Act lawsuit made Congress more aware of the discriminatory actions made against African Americans by the USDA (Merem, 2006). Next, 1,000 African-American farmers filed a \$3.5 billion class action suit against the USDA. This case would be called the Pigford Class Action Suit, officially filed in 1997 (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). The Pigford Suit was settled in 1999; the government forgave more than \$17 million in remaining loans and paid \$629 million in claims to nearly 13,000 African-American farmers (Moon, 2007).

Diversity in Agricultural Education

With most African-American farmers averaging a around 65 years of age, lack of representation of African-American youth in the agriculture industry is apparent (USDA, 2007). Today, less than 1% of African-American farmers are under 25 years of age, showing a small amount of youth participation in agriculture (Merem, 2006). According to the Food, Agriculture and Education Information System (FAEIS) (2014), in 2012, only 5,466 African-American students were enrolled in an agricultural-related science in the United States. Anderson (2006) wrote, “Underrepresented minorities tend to struggle to find instructors, classmates and programs with which they feel a connection” (p. 11), which is assumed to aid in the weaker performances of some students. In 2000, African Americans represented roughly 11% of the total enrollment of higher education institutions in the United States (Burns, 2006). With African Americans representing 13% of the nation’s population, universities have developed various recruitment strategies to increase the number of African Americans interested in higher education (Burns, 2006).

From 2002 to 2005, a slight decline of enrollment of African Americans “in undergraduate agriculture and natural related sciences degrees nationally” occurred (Burns, 2006, p. 10); however, a dearth of literature exists on the actual factors that may contribute to this recent decline. Burns (2006) explained: “This decrease in interest for African Americans could translate into a decrease in collegiate enrollment and explain the variation by academic year in national enrollment in agriculture and related sciences” (p. 11).

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). “If our children could look at Carver’s face on a jar of peanut butter, they would start saying ‘I want to be like George and not just be like Mike’” (Morgan, 2000, p. 24).

Morgan (2000) spoke with Dr. Annie King, an associate dean in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the University of California-Davis, to find her thoughts on the lack of African-American representation in agricultural programs. In her words,

I was taught by my parents, who had been sharecroppers, that working on the land or with products from the land was an honorable profession...But many parents and grandparents today tell young men and women about the great hardship associated with slavery or they speak about dirty, hard work with low pay, or even the loss of family-owned farms. (Morgan, 2000, p. 23)

Brown (1993) conducted a study to investigate the core reasons why African-American youth do not seem to show a great interest in agriculture. He said a few of the possible contributing factors for the lack of interest in agriculture from African-American youth are home life, school-related factors, and the importance of education (Brown, 1993).. He found most African-American students avoid agriculture programs because of the misconception that only farm and other production-related jobs are available in the industry (Brown, 1993).. In his research, he also found many of the high school participants had little or no knowledge of agriculture or the careers available in the agriculture industry (Brown, 1993).

Reaching Back to the Older Generation

A number of speculations have surfaced as to why Black farmers have struggled to stay afloat throughout the years. “The Next Generation, ‘That’s Why We Continue to do What We do’: African American Farmers Speak About Experiences with Land Ownership and Loss in North Carolina” is a qualitative study targeted to explore the challenges African-American farmers face within a community in North Carolina. In this study, Balvanz et al. (2011) explored the perception of agriculture from an older generation of African-American farmers who were either previously or currently involved in farming. They also looked into the discriminatory effects on farmland loss within the African-American community (Balvanz et al., 2011). The issues faced by African Americans to keep the family farm were also explored (Balvanz et al., 2011).

Balvanz et al. (2011) found three themes: Historical and Current Discrimination, Positive Perceptions of Farming, and Farming and the Next Generation. They learned about the discriminatory practices that had been experienced by the participants in past and present years, and a lot of these practices helped African-American farmers to become better entrepreneurs (Balvanz et al., 2011). The researchers also found that many of the participants perceived farming would help strengthen work ethic in youth and keep them out of trouble, which was why they wanted to keep their roots in the farm (Balvanz et al., 2011).

Theoretical Lenses

In this study three theories were used to help view and conceptualize the results. This section discussed the Expectancy Value theory, diffusion of innovations and the gatekeeping theory and how they apply to this research.

Expectancy Value Theory

The Expectancy Value (E-V) theory is typically used by researchers to explore the different aspects individuals have when valuing academics (DeBacker & Nelson, 1999). With this theory, researchers also can examine what individuals expect as far as success and how this will add to their accomplishment behaviors (DeBacker & Nelson, 1999). This theory was derived from John Atkinson's expectancy value model (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

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)

Jacquelynne Eccles and her colleagues created an E-V theory model that assumes negative and positive task characteristics influence choices (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; see Figure 1). Costs are associated with choices and this often helps individuals eliminate other options (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Therefore, Eccles concluded that values and expectations are positively associated and the choices individuals make and are determined by the value and success of their numerous options (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

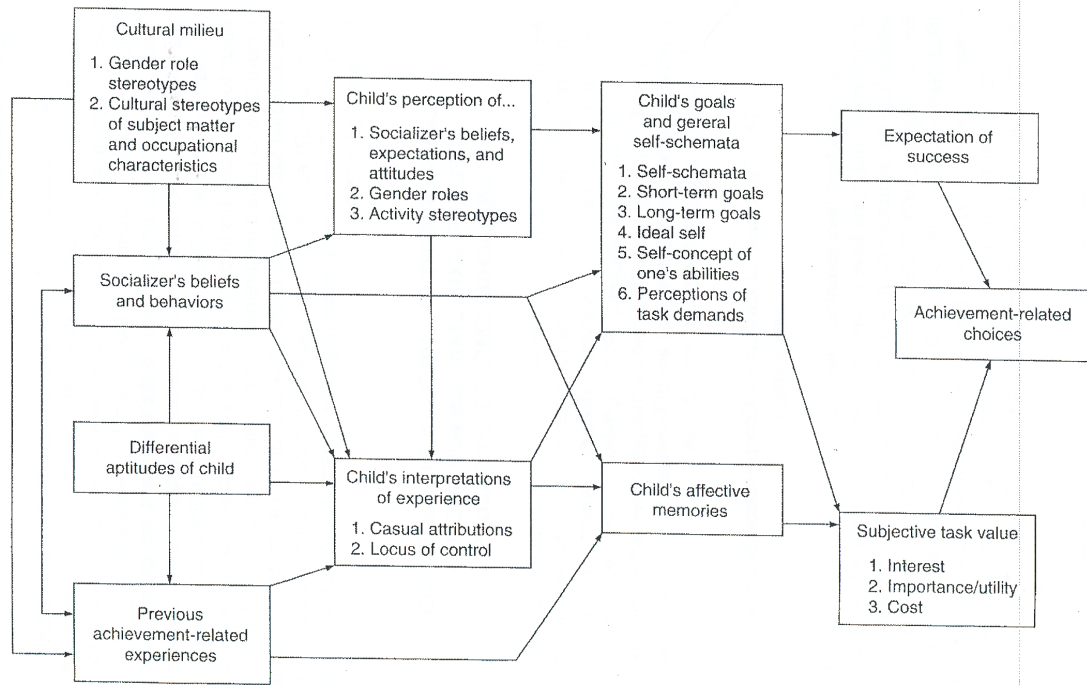


Figure 1. Expectancy-value model of achievement motivation. Adapted from Development of achievement motivation (p. 93), by Wigfield, A. (Ed.), & Eccles, J. S. (Ed.), 2002, London, UK: Academic Press. Copyright 2002 by Academic Press.

The E-V model shows how expectancies and values affect the behavior of individuals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Eccles proposed that persistence, task choice, and performance are influenced by expectancies and values; expectancies and values are influenced by how the individual perceives proficiency and the difficulty associated with various tasks as well as their personal self-schema and goals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). “The social cognitive variables, in turn, are individuals’ perceptions of other peoples’ attitudes and expectations for them, by their affective memories, and by their own interpretations of their previous achievement outcomes” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 118).

Expectancies for success are how well individuals perceive they will do on immediate or future tasks (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). In their model, beliefs represent broad beliefs about competence in a particular area (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The satisfaction an individual experiences from performing a task or the personal interest one has in a subject area is called the intrinsic value (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). When individuals create current and future goals, how well those goals relate to a task is defined as the utility value. The negative parts of performing a task are considered to be the cost (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). An example of perceptions that would affect the cost would be when an individual experiences fear of failure or success or performance anxiety (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Diffusions of Innovation Theory

According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is the process by which members of a society or social system communicate an innovation through particular channels over time among 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). When a new innovation comes along individuals go through an innovation-decision process (Rogers, 2003). People “conceptualize [or move through] five main steps in the innovation-decision process: (1) knowledge, (2) persuasion, (3) decision, (4) implementation, and (5) confirmation” (Rogers, 2003, p. 20).

When an individual gets information about a new innovation, knowledge is gained (Rogers, 2003). Persuasion occurs when an individual develops a favorable attitude toward a new innovation (Rogers, 2003). The decision happens when an individual begins to make an effort to make the choice to adopt or reject a new innovation

(Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) described laggards as the last in a social system to accept and use a new innovation. Implementation happens when an individual adopts a new innovation (Rogers, 2003). Confirmation occurs when individuals warrant reinforcement on a decision that has been made, but they may change their decision if new information is learned (Rogers, 2003).

Ideal types of individuals adopt a new innovation and this causes them to be very careful before adopting new innovations (Rogers, 2003). Venturesome innovators almost have an obsession with innovation and have the ability to deal with the uncertainty to adopt a new innovation (Rogers, 2003). Early adopters have much power in leading a system to adopt a new practice and they are well respected by their peers (Rogers, 2003). The group of people that adopt new innovations just before the average individual in a system are the early majority (Rogers, 2003); the late majority adopts a new innovation shortly after the average individual in a system (Rogers, 2003). Laggards are individuals who adopt a new innovation last in a system, if at all (Rogers, 2003).

With the low numbers of African Americans choosing to pursue an agricultural-related career, the thought of becoming a part of this industry may appear as a new innovation to many African Americans. Using the diffusion of innovations theory also helped the researcher to examine the potential thought processes behind why the study's participants chose to pursue a career in agriculture as an African American.

Gatekeeping Theory

Kurt Lewin first coined the term “*gatekeeping*” in 1942 (Twente, 2014). Lewin explored how food reaches the tables of families “through channels to cognitive heurisophisticated theory that connects past ideas” (Johnson, 2010, p. 453). The

gatekeeping theory has five levels of forces and decisions: (1) Individual, (2) Communication Routines, (3) Organizational, (4) Social/Institutional and (5) Social System Level (Johnson, 2010). Gatekeepers are the individuals who make the decisions within a social system on what information will move forward and what will not (Twente, 2014). The gatekeepers have much power in controlling the knowledge to which the public is able to gain access (Twente, 2014).

“The gatekeepers’ choices are a complex web of influences, preferences, motives and common values” (Twente, 2014, para. 2). With the power gatekeepers hold, the risk of the manipulation and abuse of this power exists (Twente, 2014). Gatekeeping can be in the work place, institutions, or organizations (Twente, 2014). African Americans who are currently in the agriculture industry could potentially become gatekeepers within the African-American community. They can help determine what African-American youth have access to as it pertains to the agriculture industry and use their power to help encourage them to examine the opportunities agriculture has to offer.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter III describes the methodology used during this study along with the ideas and concepts to ensure ethical procedures were used while conducting the research.

Institutional Review Board

As the foundation of what I wanted to research took shape, I submitted a research project proposal to the Oklahoma State University Office of University Research Compliance. It was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research proposal was reviewed and approved by the IRB on February 20, 2014. The application number assigned to this study was AG1358 (see Appendix A).

The IRB is an administrative body established to protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects recruited to participate in research activities conducted under the auspices of the institution with which it is affiliated. The IRB has the authority to approve, require modifications in, or disapprove all research activities that fall within its jurisdiction as specified by both the federal regulations and local institutional policy (Penslar, 1993, para. 1).

The purpose of this study was to examine the essence of the lived experiences of African-American students and how these experiences influenced the students' choices of college majors. A qualitative approach was used to better understand how African-

American young adults interpreted their life experiences as they pertained to agriculture (Merriam, 2009).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology emphasizes lived experience and interpretation (Merriam, 2009). The phenomenology approach gives researchers the opportunity to examine human experiences from the perspective of the subjects of a study (Creswell, 1994). “The task of the phenomenologist, then, is to depict the essences or basic structure of experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). The number of African Americans choosing to study agricultural-related studies are considerably small (Burns, 2006), so the African-American students who choose to study agricultural sciences are displaying an interesting phenomenon. What is making these students decide to pursue a career in an area where they are a minority and, historically as a race, faced hardships (Balvanz et al., 2011)? A phenomenological approach was the most appropriate method to study such perplexing occurrences.

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 his or her perspectives (Lester, 2005). Moustakas (1994) explained the concept of a phenomenon by saying: “The very appearance of something makes it phenomenon. The challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of essence of the experience” (p. 49). An essence is the brief description that stems from the textural and structural description (Creswell, 2013). This

brief description summarizes the shared experiences of each of the individuals and reduces it to the essentials of those experiences (Creswell, 2013).

The methodology of transcendental phenomenology can be divided into three core processes: (1) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, (2) Epoche, and (3) Imaginative Variation (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction shows each experience is its own and is described by a textural description (Moustakas, 1994), which is how the researcher describes what the individual experienced (Creswell, 2013). Epoche takes the researcher's everyday judgments and places them to the side to revisit a fresh, new phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative Variation helps the researcher create a structural description to present the reader with how the phenomenon was experienced by the individuals (Moustakas, 1994).

The transcendental phenomenological approach used for this study was Epoche, and this approach "engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). The name Epoche is derived from the Greek word *epoch* (Moustakas, 1994). The approach is celebrated in qualitative research (Creswell, 1994). This process allows researchers to separate themselves from the phenomena and prevent biases and preconceptions from being present in the study, while allowing themselves to view things in a new way (Moustakas, 1994). During transcendental phenomenology, the researcher is encouraged to rely on his or her imagination and intuition to receive the full picture of the experiences being shared (Creswell, 2013).

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 the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) in the 2013-2014 academic year. Of the 2,720 students studying in CASNR, 46 were African American, including graduate and undergraduate students, providing a target population of 46 (CASNR, 2014). After recruiting subjects through email messages and snowball sampling, nine undergraduate participants were recruited ($n = 9$). For the protection of each of the participants, they were given pseudonyms.

Data Collection

As recommended by Creswell (1994), face-to face interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes were held with each participant individually. I wanted to interview my participants because the interviewing process allows the researcher the opportunity to learn information that could help better explain a phenomenon (Creswell, 1994). All of the interviews were held in small conference rooms on the Oklahoma State University campus. The interviews were semi-structured, and open-ended questions were used (see Appendix F), allowing me the flexibility to follow emerging ideas (Merriam, 2009). The questions prepared before or asked during the interview were created with the purpose to explore the problem being studied and to reveal each participant's personal experiences and the meanings behind those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews were recorded with an iPhone[®] using a downloadable, digital-recording application called Audio Memos.

After the interviews were conducted and recorded, I transcribed each interview using *Express Scribe*, a transcription software. When the transcripts were created, each of

the participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. After I transcribed the data in Microsoft Word, I sent each participant his or her completed transcript via an email message and gave each five days to respond if he or she perceived the transcripts misrepresented him or her in any way. The changes I received from the participants within those five days were applied to the transcripts. Next, I prepared the data collected for the analysis process by using the Van Kaam Method (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants

Ricky

Ricky is an 18-year-old African-American male from a rural area with nearly 13,000 residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) in the South. He is a freshman at Oklahoma State University, majoring in landscape architecture. Ricky grew up in a considerably rural area and was always drawn to nature and the outdoors, but he did not get exposed to agriculture until later in his life. He does not have any other family or friends involved in the agricultural industry. He was initially torn between becoming a pharmacist or a landscape architect, but when he saw Eddie George, an African-American retired National Football League player and someone that he looked up to immensely, was a landscape architect, he was persuaded to pursue a career in the same field.

Taylor

Taylor is a 19-year-old African-American female from a large metropolitan area with approximately 400,000 residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) in the South. She is a freshman at Oklahoma State University, majoring in animal science with a pre-veterinarian concentration. She has been raised around animals, mostly dogs, for all of her life, and this sparked her love for animals. The fact she rarely saw African-American

veterinarians pushed her to pursue a career in agriculture as a veterinarian. She does not have other family or friends in the agricultural industry, but her father's love for animals influenced her passion for dogs and their welfare.

Kasey

Kasey is a 19-year-old African-American female from a large metropolitan area with approximately 2 million residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) in the South. She is a sophomore at Oklahoma State University, majoring in animal science. She grew up a block away from the downtown area, but her grandfather owned a farm in the South, and this initially sparked her interest in agriculture. Her experiences and memories of her family farm, which her grandfather has sold, helped build her connection to the industry and instilled in her a great appreciation for the rural lifestyle.

Kenny

Kenny is a 21-year-old African-American male from a suburb of a large with approximately 8 thousands residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) metropolitan area in the South. He is a senior at Oklahoma State University, majoring in agribusiness. He initially was a business major but after meeting with an adviser in CASNR, he chose to change his major to agribusiness to try something different that would have much potential for growth in his future career. His grandfather had a small family farm in the South where he was able to spend some of his summers as a youth, which was his first exposure to agriculture.

Eddie

Eddie is a 20-year-old African-American male from a metropolitan area with approximately 600,000 residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) in the South. He is a freshman at

Oklahoma State University, majoring in agribusiness. He attended an inner-city high school in his hometown, but he transferred to a suburban high school for his senior year. He was raised in a rural environment. Eddie was exposed to agriculture at a young age by his grandmother, who raised livestock animals and expressed great concern when it came to the importance of meat safety. His family background and push from his aunt gave him the drive to pursue a career in the agricultural industry.

Cassie

Cassie is a 19-year-old African-American female from an urban area with approximately 105,000 residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) in the South. She is a freshman at Oklahoma State University, majoring in animal science with a pre-veterinarian concentration. She studied agricultural education in high school and was very involved in extracurricular activities. She was initially introduced to the agricultural field when she was in the ninth grade, which was when she joined FFA. Previous to this, she only had a few friends but not much family involved in agriculture. Cassie is also bi-racial, mixed with Black and White, which makes her perspective very interesting. Her White relatives were all involved in the agricultural industry. She chose to pursue a career as a future veterinarian because of the opportunity to combine her love for the medical field and her involvement in agriculture.

Derek

Derek is a 20-year-old African-American male from an urban area with approximately 123,000 residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) in the South. He is a freshman at Oklahoma State University, majoring in animal science with the production option. He first got involved in the agricultural field when he was a sophomore in high school. Derek

had a desire to learn how to ride a horse, and once he connected with a locally known agriculturist, he made a deal with the agriculturist: He would teach Derek how to ride horse while Derek worked for him at his horse operation. As time passed, Derek became more involved in agriculture. He joined FFA where he held the office of president and did horse judging, livestock judging, and parliamentary procedure. He was also part of three-time state winning livestock judging team for Louisiana. The extent of his family's involvement in agriculture are trail rides and boar hunting.

Destiny

Destiny is a 19-year-old African-American female from an urban area with approximately 58,000 residents (Advameg, Inc., 2014) in the South. She is a freshman at Oklahoma State University, majoring in animal science with a pre-veterinarian concentration. Her mother was in the Air Force when she was growing up, and she spent much of her childhood in a southern, urban town, on an Air Force base. She has always embraced the western lifestyle, wearing boots and attending rodeos on a regular basis as a child. Destiny has always had a great love for animals, and this is what ultimately drove her to pursue an animal science degree. Most of her family is not involved in the agricultural industry, but she does have a cousin who is an environmental engineer and conversations with him helped her decide what she wanted to do with her academic career.

Robert

Robert is a 20-year-old African-American male from a southeastern state. He is currently a junior at Oklahoma State University, majoring in agricultural education. Robert has an agricultural background, growing up on his family farm where his adoptive

parents taught him the importance and practices of agriculture. Robert has a very interesting background; his parents are foster parents, fostering hundreds of kids over the years, exposing him to many different cultures and lifestyles. His parents are also Caucasian, which gives Robert a unique perspective. His drive to pursue a career in agriculture was increased when he participated in a research project that found there were only two African-American agricultural education teachers in Oklahoma. These numbers shocked Robert and pushed him to continue his journey to become an agricultural educator.

Summary of Participants

Table 1 summarized the participants of this study and serves as a quick reference for the participants.

Table 1

Summary of the Study's 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 pursue AG.
Robert	Agricultural Education	Grew up in a rural area on his family's farm. Strong AG BG. Lack of AA AG teachers persuaded him to pursue AG.

Note. AA= African American; AG= Agriculture; BG= Background

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam Method. After all of the interviews were transcribed, data analysis began. I reviewed each transcript and familiarized myself with the participants and their experiences by creating lists and preliminary groups (Moustakas, 1994). The participants' thoughts that correlated with the experiences were highlighted, which is known as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994).

Each participant shared his or her thoughts and emotions as they related to his or her experiences as an African American pursuing an agricultural-related major, which gave more information as to what could be influencing this phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As the primary research instrument in this study, I used rich descriptions to share what I learned from my participants with my audience (Merriam, 2009). To guarantee the trustworthiness and credibility of my findings, direct quotes were inserted. All of the participants contributed a piece of themselves that helped me in better understanding what influenced them to pursue a career in agriculture as an African American.

To help the reader identify the participants easily and to ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of the data, each direct quote was identified by the first four letters of the participant's pseudonym and with the line number or numbers associated with the statement enclosed in brackets. Each participant had the opportunity to make the changes necessary to his or her transcript, and, after review and edits, I proceeded with the analysis of the data. Working closely with the participants helped the study maintain transparency and remain ethical.

Atlas.ti.v. 7 was used to help create codes for all of the significant statements throughout the transcripts and keep them organized. Next, I took all of the invariant constituents and clustered them into labeled themes (Moustakas, 1994). From the nine participants, 146 significant statements were found under 35 codes, and 6 themes emerged. “Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 173). Next, each theme was explained through rich descriptions along with direct quotes from the participants.

Ethical Considerations

While shaping this qualitative study, Tracy’s (2010) Eight “Big-Tent” Criteria were used to ensure high-quality qualitative research: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). As a qualitative researcher, I knew it was critical to apply Tracy’s concepts to the study to ensure strong results that could change the way people address the recruitment and encouragement of African Americans into the agricultural industry.

Research must be relevant, and finding worthy topics is one of the first steps to creating a timely piece of work (Tracy, 2010). A study that sparks the interest of an audience examines numerous assumptions many people take for granted or challenges previously accepted ideas (Tracy, 2010). According to Tracy (2010), studies that explore a little-known phenomenon are often more interesting. With the small numbers of African Americans choosing to pursue agricultural-related careers, the phenomena of the African-American students who do choose an agricultural career must be explored.

Learning more about what these students think and what led them to choose this career could help increase the numbers African Americans studying agriculture in the future.

The next of the eight criteria is the concept of rich rigor. “A richly rigorous qualitative scholar is also better equipped to make smart choices about samples and contexts that are appropriate or well poised to study specific issues” (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). Tracy (2010) suggested when one checks to ensure he or she is rigorous with research, he or she should ask four questions:

1. Do you have enough data to support strong claims?
2. Did you spend enough time collecting significant data?
3. Can the sample help you reach the goals of the study?
4. Did you follow the correct procedure to analyze your data, take field notes, or interview your participants?

I asked myself these questions while conducting my research. When I selected my target sample, I had goals in mind. I knew speaking with African Americans currently studying agricultural-related majors could help me learn more about their thoughts and feelings as a minority in this industry. Not only would their insights help me learn about why they chose this area of study, but also it would be possible for them to help me better understand why there are not more African Americans pursuing degrees in this area and how we can encourage an increase in enrollment. I also ensured I had enough time to conduct the individual interviews. I interviewed participants until my data became saturated and I began to hear many of the same responses multiple times. I also carefully analyzed my data using Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Van Kaam Method.

Maintaining a sense of sincerity is critical in qualitative research and can be reached by being honest, self-reflexive, and transparent (Tracy, 2010). The researcher must be honest about goals and biases to create honest work (Tracy, 2010). I practiced self-reflexivity during my research. I wanted to be honest with myself and reveal to the reader what biases I had that could possibly influence me as a researcher. Prior to conducting my research, I started a journal where I wrote down my feelings and thoughts to become more aware of my biases, which would help me to avoid letting them control my work. I also showed transparency in my work by sharing my methodology with the reader.

Credibility is another ethical consideration in qualitative research. When research is trustworthy and reliable, this builds its credibility (Tracy, 2010). When referring to qualitative research, Tracy stated credibility “is achieved through thick description, triangulation or crystallization, and multivocality and partiality” (p. 843). Thick description gives so much detail that it allows the readers to form their own conclusions about the information received (Tracy, 2010). Triangulation is reached when multiple sources of data or researchers reach the same conclusion, which makes the conclusion more reliable (Tracy, 2010; Denzin, 1978). Crystallization encourages researchers to better understand an issue by gathering numerous types of data, theoretical frameworks or examining different researchers (Tracy, 2010). Multivocality is when researchers are aware of possible cultural differences between them and their subjects (Tracy, 2010).

How strongly an audience is affected by a researcher’s work is termed as resonance and aesthetic merit, and generalizability/transferability are practices that can help researchers reach resonance with their readers (Tracy, 2010). When writing is

presented in an artistic way it is called aesthetic merit (Tracy, 2010), which is also helpful in grabbing the reader's attention. Generalizability in qualitative research is not the same as that of quantitative research. The information found from qualitative research can prove to be useful in other settings, environments, or situations (Tracy, 2010).

When creating a new study, one must ask if the research will extend knowledge or help educate others (Tracy, 2010). If the answers to questions such as these are yes, then the research may be a significant contribution to the literature (Tracy, 2010). Significant contributions can be reached several different ways when conducting qualitative research. A theoretical contribution could be made when researchers use an existing theory in a fresh, new context; heuristic significance is when researchers can influence others to continue to research further in the future, and methodological significance could happen when a researcher uses a creative way to analyze data or approach an issue that has only been addressed with quantitative approaches (Tracy, 2010).

When conducting qualitative research, the end product must remain ethical (Tracy, 2010). Ethical practices in qualitative research are addressed as procedural ethics, relational ethics, situational ethics, and exiting ethics (Tracy, 2010). Procedural ethics pertains to larger entities that dictate ethical actions, such as universities or organizations (Tracy, 2010). Situational ethics emerged from a Christian theology and states that ethical acts come from context and reasoning (Tracy, 2010). Relational ethics apply when the researcher respects his or her subjects and realizes and embraces their roles and create a good study (Tracy, 2010). Exiting ethics happens after the data has been collected and is how the researcher chooses to present his or her findings and share the results.

The last ethical consideration presented is meaningful coherence. Meaningful coherence is achieved when researchers connect their theoretical framework and situational goals with their data collecting and analysis procedures (Tracy, 2010). “A meaningful coherent place makes use of the concepts that fit their paradigm and research goals” (Tracy, 2010, p. 848).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is highly celebrated in qualitative research and gives the researchers the opportunity to be honest with themselves, the readers, and the research itself (Tracy, 2010). I will share my background to ensure self-reflexivity with my audience, research, and self. I am an African-American female originally from Memphis, Tennessee, and I grew up in a considerably rural suburb on the outskirts of the city. My mother and my father have an agricultural background. My father grew up on a small family farm in Jackson, Tennessee, with his grandparents, while my mother would travel to her grandparents’ small farm in Medon, Tennessee, nearly every summer. There was roughly 70 acres of land between the two farms, and they produced cotton, corn, black-eyed peas, and other fruits and vegetables. They also raised hogs, chickens, beef, and dairy cattle on their farms. My father studied agriculture in high school and was an active member of the FFA.

The most exposure I had to agriculture growing up were the stories my parents told me about life on the farm and how our family acquired land after slavery. I did not gain an interest in agriculture until I went to college, which is where I had my first hands-on experiences on the farm. I gained a Bachelor of Science in agriculture with a concentration in agriscience and a minor in communication arts from Austin Peay State

University, and I am now pursuing a Master of Science in agricultural communications from Oklahoma State University. The reality of noticing I was one of the only, if not the only, African American in my agricultural programs from both universities sparked my interest to want to learn more about this phenomenon.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This qualitative study focused on nine African-American participants who have chosen to study an agricultural-related science at an 1862 land-grant institution: Oklahoma State University. Two of my participants were selected from the recruitment email sent, while the other seven were selected through snowball sampling. My participants were selected on the basis they were African-American students between the ages of 18 and 25 and were attending Oklahoma State University in CASNR during the 2013-2014 academic year. All of the subjects have different backgrounds, such as age, college classification, and major. Chapter IV will be used to discuss the results found in this study. Table 2 will list the themes found in this study.

Table 2

The Meaning of Being an African American in Agriculture Themes

Themes
1. Positive Experiences or Influences Drove Decision to Join Agriculture
2. The Desire for African-American Students to Create Change Strengthens the Pursuit of an Agricultural-Related Degree
3. Historical Hurts and Lack of Encouragement Contribute to Low Numbers of African Americans in Agriculture
4. Going Back, Creating Programs, and Early Exposure for African-American Youth Can Increase Their Involvement in Agriculture
5. Positive Effects and Perceptions Experienced While Involved in Agriculture
6. Negative Effects and Perceptions Experienced While Involved in Agriculture

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

One of the most important things I wanted learn about this phenomenon is why these African-American students chose to major in agricultural-related majors. Kasey talked about her experiences growing up on her family farm in Texas and how it helped influence her choice to join the agricultural industry. She also described her love for animals and its role in swaying her decision. Kasey said:

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].

When asked if her farm experiences affected her choices, she said, “Yeah, just that experience and I just really love animals” [KASE; 42]. Kenny talked about his experience at OSU and how one of the advisers encouraged him to make the switch.

“Really, I actually went to the AG business, AG College and just kind of spoke with some of the advisers there, and my adviser now ... he actually, really is the one who influenced me to go ahead and make the switch” [KENN; 60-62].

Ricky also discussed the role that an African American in the agricultural industry played in his decision to pursue a career as a landscape architecture and said:

Because I was trying to choose between [becoming] a pharmacist 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].

Cassie talked about the encouragement she received from her adviser and how it influenced her to get involved in agriculture.

Well, major factors my AG adviser, she was very [influential], because she was the one who pushed me to be better than what I was. And she’s the one who said like, “hey, you have like, a chance in this ... with big shows I’ve gotten second place, I’ve gotten grand champion at major shows, and so that really helped me out. And then, with just that enjoyment, that love for, my new love for agriculture that I just wanted to continue it on, not stop it in high school. I just wanted to go with it” [CASS; 74-76, 79-82].

Theme 2: The Desire for African-American Students to Create Change Strengthens the Pursuit of an Agricultural-related Degree

During much of the interviews with my participants, they discussed their desires to create change. Many of the participants also were driven to pursue agricultural-related degrees because of the lack of African Americans present in the industry. Taylor explained the change she wanted to see in veterinary science:

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].

Robert experienced the same thing in the agricultural education field. He said:

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 and 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].

Participants also shared how they perceived African Americans could make a huge difference by joining the agricultural industry. Kenny described why African Americans should join this field:

Absolutely, like I said, the career opportunities are definitely growing. You're going to need AG, and with the world population booming you know the jobs are

going to come so you got to transition Black people in the mindset of you know this is where the world's going and you got to hop on board and you know try to find those jobs and try to make a difference in AG because we're definitely capable [KENN; 103-107].

Kenny also touched on how he viewed it would be a positive result for African Americans to use agriculture as a platform to make a difference on a global scale.

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].

The participants shared the idea that African Americans should make an impact on the world and the agricultural industry was a great industry in which to do this. Many of the participants also talked about wanting to join the agricultural industry because it was something different. Derek expressed this view:

I figured that if I could continue on aiming to be successful and even though like your study is going on, not many African Americans are involved in this, I figured I wanted to be different. I'm not a person that wants to do everything everyone else does. I want to do something different. So my goal was to make a change and make a difference [DERE; 46-51].

Derek also talked about the impact he believed he can make by being a part of the agricultural industry.

That's what I see. I feel that if I can make a difference in the agriculture industry, I can make a difference in any other society, industry, or problem in the United States and in the international point of view [DERE; 75-78].

Cassie also shared her experience of seeing more African Americans get involved in agriculture and how exciting it was for her.

And then other people, as I got in it, there's other Black people that got in it, as well. And so I was you know, really confident, I was like, yeah, we can make a difference for ourselves in this school [CASS; 101-103].

Robert discussed the importance of African Americans getting involved in agriculture and how it is time for them to make an impression in this industry.

Through my eyes it is important that we as African Americans make our mark, uh, with the world, like uh, the world is a salad bowl. We each play a part, and we African Americans, we need to step up to the plate, so to speak, and take part, make our mark [ROBE; 24-27].

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

When a phenomenon exists such as the one studied, researchers must explore why it is happening. 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. First, the struggle of forgetting the past.

Destiny expressed how the history of slavery in America affects African Americans' decisions to join the agricultural industry today. She said, "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]. Cassie seemed to share those same views, and she showed this by saying:

When like back in slavery we were working the fields for the farmer and so I guess since we kind of got out of it. It's just been White people back then to. But I don't know, we shouldn't use that as a crutch but that's how I feel [CASS; 152-155].

Another perspective expressed was the perception of being a minority in this industry. Destiny also shared how many African Americans may believe they do not have a place in this field, where their numbers are so small, but if they are exposed to the industry early then they may avoid some of these perceptions.

Yes, it's before they kind of learn to think that they shouldn't be in that field because its always majority is White like maybe they think they shouldn't be in that field. But if they're younger and they, if they're just interested they and don't have to worry about any kind of racism or anything like that. They could just go with it [DEST; 235-238].

One of the most interesting viewpoints that occurred repeatedly was that African Americans are more drawn to show business than agriculture. Eddie talked about how African Americans are drawn to what they see on television, and most of what they see are Blacks excelling in athletics and entertainment.

Let me think. I don't know a lot of people will say a lot of Black people are more interested of what they see on TV and what they hear instead of actually going out and look for something ... I would say like what they watch. They watch BET a

lot, they might watch ESPN or even cartoons or movies or it can be anything but they don't have lot of advertisements or commercials about the actual food that we eat [EDDI; 146-148, 155-157].

Kasey also expressed the same concerns. She described how people emulate what they see and how this is relevant in the African-American community.

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 see 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].

Many of my participants perceive the low numbers of African Americans involved in agriculture has much to do with lack of encouragement directed to them from the agricultural industry. Robert elaborated on this idea:

I believe that, uh, in our government provides a lot of different opportunities for minorities students to, uh, encourage in my opinion, the government needs to put, uh, quite a few more emphasis on encouraging minorities in the field of agriculture [ROBE; 144-147].

When Derek discussed his beliefs on the agricultural industry's target audience he said, "I feel people aren't going out to the right people. The AG industry. They're going more out to the White people, and that's not good at all" [DERE; 327-328].

Another factor many participants saw as a contributor to the lack of African Americans is the lack of exposure or knowledge of what the industry has to offer. Kasey

discussed how her experience in agriculture helped her learn that she even had an interest in this field.

Like if you haven't been around that then how would you know that you want that to be your major. See if I never would've had that farm or if I never would've went to the livestock show, I wouldn't be the least interested in cows, or horses, or dogs, or anything [KASE; 185-188].

Robert expressed how the environment in which one grows up influences the career he or she chooses to pursue. He said, "A lot of African Americans that I know of are raised in the suburbs. And they don't, they go for the, you know, suburb jobs, or what not. They don't ever consider agriculture" [ROBE; 133-135]. Eddie expounded upon this issue by saying many African Americans may not know what kind of jobs are available; he stated, "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]. Kenny also discussed how many African Americans may not be willing to join the industry because they may have a misconception about what the industry truly includes:

Black people aren't willing to embrace it as some other people so I think that kind of switch in their mind that there's not just, you're not just going to be on a farm. You know there's other things you can do food, fiber, energy and all kind of other things [KENN; 120-123].

Derek shared his struggles of being financially able to participate in the agricultural industry and explained how this problem may affect other African Americans. He stated, "A lot of African Americans aren't in the agricultural industry

because of financial reasons” [DERE; 110-111]. Table 3 will list more significant statements from this theme.

Table 3

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

Significant statements related to the theme

“Just like slavery days. Categorizing on Slavery. And just because they see all white people. Like back in my high school days In FFA I was pretty much the only black guy” [DERE; 127-129].

“I believe so, I think, its um, pretty much any feel that its majority white, or just like in engineering, how its majority is male people going into might be slightly uncomfortable and they maybe as well be discouraged from it” [DEST; 243-235].

“African Americans like they want to play sports and do things like that, so they’d probably go into physical therapy, or something, and, or they just want to play sports, or go into the music industry probably. They don’t really see themselves in agriculture working on farms or something” [DEST; 153-156].

“This is my personal opinion, uh African Americans are not, I guess you would say they’re not quite, people don’t really encourage them as much as they do Caucasians” [ROBE; 129-131].

“Like black people, or black men should I say, are like more into basketball than we are, then like, I guess white men, because that was society has pictured them as. And so that’s kind of what they go towards is what they’ve grown up with or what they know. And so if they don’t know about it, then of course they’re not going to get into it” [CASS; 91-94].

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 agricultural industry. To increase their numbers, Kenny suggested implementing programs into high schools that would expose African Americans to the importance of agriculture.

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 there's not just farming then you could definitely see a change. Things could definitely pick up for Black people in AG [KENN; 141-146].

Kasey discussed the importance of successful African-American agriculturists going back into the community to encourage other African-American youth to pursue agriculture as a career.

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 too. 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].

Taylor also spoke to this idea and said, "I think we just need to have more older people Black African Americans that succeed and went to college to come out and tell

Black kids that all because your Black doesn't mean that you can't succeed into anything" [TAYL; 235-237]. Table 4 will list more significant statements from this theme.

Table 4

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

Significant statement related to the theme

"I think that would help like if they see how much the country depends on agriculture and food, because we all know foods important but no one never really kind of, most people, don't really think about where it comes from we just go to the store and buy it. And so, like if they kind of see the process behind what needs to be done maybe that would get them interested, like maybe they'd want to help, help out the world"[DEST; 258-263].

Theme 5: Positive Effects and Perceptions Experienced While Involved in Agriculture

During their time in the agricultural field, these students had many experiences. Kenny really enjoyed the time he had with his classmates and enjoyed the support he received from them. He said: "Like I said I've been learning as I go but I've really enjoyed a lot of it I'm learning new stuff honestly everyday from going to classes and hearing people talk. My classmates have been really supportive" [KENN; 73-75]. Taylor also shared her experience with her classmates by saying: "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].

Ricky also discussed the comraderie he experienced in his program. He said, "But everybody treats you like a family here at OSU, same with the AG Program, especially with my program, agriculture architecture because it's not that many of us" [RICK; 61-63].

It seems agriculture also helped troubled youth find a new way out and showed them how to do something positive with their life. Cassie spoke about how joining FFA helped her get on the right path.

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]

Derek discussed how being involved in agriculture had helped him learn many life qualities by saying, "AG taught me a lot of life qualities. I had a lot of new connections and everything" [DERE; 664-665]. He also experienced that joining the agricultural industry could potentially help African Americans gain confidence. He said, "African Americans are going to be a lot more noticeable in the agriculture industry and also they also can be I don't know, feel more greater about themselves than now" [DERE; 282-284]. Cassie shared Derek's idea by explaining the emotion she held about being a part of the agricultural industry as a minority. She said, "I feel empowered. I don't know if that's right, but I feel empowered" [CASS; 274].

Cassie also shared the excitement her family experienced when she told them she would be pursuing an agricultural-related degree. She said, “My African-American side of the family is not really into AG, and so they were really excited that I was in anything that was kind of scientific” [CASS; 249-250]. Her grandmother was also elated by her choice. “My grandmother was really excited that I got involved into agriculture because it’s something out of the norm for our family and so she was excited that I branched and did something I really liked” [CASS; 258-261]. Table 5 will list more significant statements from this theme.

Table 5

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

Significant statements related to the theme

“I thought that I might get the off eye every now and again. Like what’s, it might not be fair for me to say that but like what’s he kind of doing here like I might get that only black kid stare in the white class. It’s been everything opposite than that” [KENN; 198-201]

“But as I got into high schooling, I got a part of AG I kind of seen a different life. I told myself I need to get away from that other life” [DERE;436-437]

I’m different and so I have a lot more chances . . . Because I’m just different. And you just don’t see a lot, and so a lot of people look for diversity and so I think I would have a greater chance because of that” [CASS; 275-276, 280-282].

**Theme 6: Negative effects and Perceptions Experienced While Involved in
Agriculture**

Along with the positive experiences of being involved in agriculture, also some negative experiences occurred for the participants. Destiny discussed the overwhelming experience of joining an unfamiliar program.

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 it's like and they already have experience from childhood [DESI;122-124].

Derek had negative experiences stemming from the reactions of his African-American friends and family after they saw him begin to get more involved in agriculture. He stated, "I kind of lost a few friendships from my Black friends because of being involved in the agriculture industry" [DERE; 143-144].

Many participants also discussed the loss of connection they perceived being a minority in agriculture. Ricky shared the emotions he experienced while being a minority by saying, "You don't really have anybody to run to sometimes" [RICK; 138] and, "You don't have anybody to relate to" [RICK; 143]. Kasey also experienced the distance of being a minority and said, "I think you can definitely feel the difference but sometimes, it's just that people aren't as willing to open up to you I guess" [KASE; 132-133]. Eddie described the lack of connections and emotions he experienced while being the only African American in some of his classes.

The connection you might have with a Black person when the whole class is White. So it's just a different feeling. I wouldn't say like for me being comfortable to where I understand cause a lot of people express something in different ways that I don't understand. And just being that one person, everybody

looks at you differently. They have a higher standard for you to make sure that you (inaudible) have a good understanding [EDDI; 264-269].

The participants also were asked if they saw African Americans presented in the media as it related to agriculture. Everyone said they did not see much of a presence in the media at all, and Destiny said, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen them” [DESI ;192]. When I asked her why she thinks this occurs, she said:

Because I guess people really don’t think of African Americans being in the AG business too much. But they, its really not that many, so I guess when people think of making their commercials that just don’t really have a passing thought of putting a African American in their commercials [DESI; 199-202].

Taylor also shared her opinion as to why she believed African Americans are not portrayed in agricultural media, and said, “I think that’s just because maybe they probably think we have a lack of educational talking in public or we might stutter or we night not have the same structure as them when they’re talking on TV” [TAYL; 286-288].

Robert addressed the adversity he faced being an African American in this industry by sharing how he uses the negativity as more motivation to reach his goals.

And the fact that I’m African American it did make it harder because a lot of people was like you can’t do that because you're African American. Well the way I see it that just means I have to work harder to get to where I need to be, to where I want to be [ROBE; 365-368].

Taylor also discussed how her White peers may view her when she enters an agricultural class.

And there's a lot of issues, you know, some of my classes I'm the only Black person in there but, you know, there some people that's nice but there's some people that's just like why is she here and all this other stuff [TAYL; 95-97]

Kasey discussed the initial shock of joining this environment by saying, "It's a little bit of culture shock. I just never been around this environment. I mean I like it, but I don't really fit in" [KASE; 106-107]. Cassie shared in this experience and talked about how she tried to adapt to a world that was so different from her own by changing a little bit of herself to gain acceptance.

I had to, like, make myself known. Like, they were just like, oh, it's just some girl, you know, just some Black girl that wants to be like us or whatever, and so like I had to make myself known. I had to, you know, fit in. I had to change some ways. I had to get in there, I had to be like, make myself likeable I guess, I don't know [CASS; 114-118].

Summary

The textural description of a phenomenological study describes what was experienced and the meanings of those experiences for those individuals (Creswell, 2013). When examining the data received during this study, the experiences of these individuals seemed to overlap. The experiences participants had during their lives, such as growing up on a farm, being exposed to agriculture, or realizing not many African Americans are present in agriculture, helped lead them to pursue a career in this industry.

After speaking with each of the participants, they revealed what it meant to be an African American studying an agricultural-related science. They shared that, at times, it was challenging, facing an industry where there are not many people with whom they

could relate and connect. They also had been supported by some of their peers, which helped make their transitions easier. Participants also voiced their desires to want to make a difference in the world, which kept them persistent in trying to reach their goals.

The structural description of a phenomenological study describes how the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell, 2013). Entering the agriculture industry gave each of the participants the opportunity to go through these experiences first hand. They experienced the feeling of being a minority when entering their classrooms and joining organizations like FFA, but they were also encouraged by the support some of their classmates gave them. Their passion was intertwined with the agriculture industry and they hoped to share this passion with other African-American youth in the future to help make this agriculture industry more diverse.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

The research questions were used to drive the interview protocol. The responses during the interviews revealed the answers to the research questions through the formation of codes and themes that were created from the data. Participants discussed their experiences as African Americans pursuing an agricultural-related career. Chapter V discusses the summary of each theme, implications, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and practice, the emergent themes connected to the literature, followed by the discussion of the study's essence and summary.

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

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 agricultural industry, although they may have faced many challenges and emotions of exclusion or judgment. Their desire to make a difference is what helped motivate them to remain persistent along with the hopes of helping to encourage other African Americans to pursue studies and careers in agriculture.

Theme 1: Positive Experiences or Influences Drove Decision to Pursue Agriculture

The experiences each participant went through helped guide his or her decisions to pursue an agricultural-related degree. Each of the participants decided to join

agriculture because of the exposure they received, because of the lack of visible African Americans in this field, or the encouragement received from someone in the industry. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory helps further explain this theme with the decision stage process. "The decision stage in the innovation-decision process takes place when an individual (or other decision-making unit) engages in activities that lead to a choice to adopt or reject an innovation" (Rogers, 2003, p. 177).

One of the participants made his final decision to pursue an agricultural degree after seeing that an African-American agriculturist he looked up to was involved in the industry. This supports Magee's idea that if African Americans see images of themselves in agriculture they would be more willing to join the industry (Morgan, 2000).

Some of the participants were exposed to agriculture through family farms and agricultural education programs at school. They shared that if they had not received the opportunity to experience agriculture, then they might not have known they had an interest. A couple of the participants also touched on the influence of their advisers and how it opened their eyes to the opportunities available in agriculture.

It could prove to be helpful in recruitment efforts if universities and colleges created more agricultural programs to be brought into areas that are heavily populated by African-American youth, including but not limited to schools and neighborhoods. Giving the youth a chance to learn about agriculture early in life could help make the option of agriculture as a career available. It also would be beneficial if more of the agricultural 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.

Further research should look into the lives of African-American youth who grew up on family farms or who have strong agricultural backgrounds. It would be interesting to see if their desire to join agriculture differs from students who have little or no agricultural background.

Theme 2: The Desire for African-American Students to Create Change Strengthens the Pursuit of an Agricultural-related Degree

One of the more significant findings of this study was some of the participants' desires to create a change. Most of the participants shared the experience of wanting to join agriculture because it was different, along with the idea of making a difference in the world by working in agriculture. This finding supports the study's theoretical lenses, as explained by the Expectancy Value Theory. The E-V Theory states that choices are influenced by the person's expectancies and values, which is driven by how individuals view the difficulty of the tasks along with their goals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

Each participant expressed that they perceived the rewards of staying involved in the agricultural industry outweighed any of the negativity experienced. This drive helped them to remain persistent in their journey to obtain their degrees and to help influence other African Americans to join the agricultural industry in the future.

Because change seemed 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 agricultural course, that highlights African Americans who have made a significant impacts in the agricultural industry. After these courses are taught, a study could be performed to see how African-American students who took this course were affected or influenced.

Future research could create a quantitative or qualitative study that would have a select group of African-American students, never exposed to agriculture, take a course such as the one suggested above. After the course is taken, have students answer a questionnaire or partake in an individual interview that reveals their views of agriculture. This interview or questionnaire should be performed before the course is taken, as well, so the researcher could compare the thoughts and see if the course made a difference in students' perceptions of agriculture.

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

This theme looked into what persuasive factors contribute to the low African-American representation in agriculture. All of the participants were asked their opinions about why so few African Americans are involved in the agricultural industry. Most of the responses revealed the lingering effects of slavery and the promotion of successful African Americans in the entertainment industry and athletics were aiding in driving African Americans into other career paths. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory can also be applied to this theme. Three of the first stages in the decision process to adopt an innovation are (1) knowledge, (2) persuasion, and (3) decision (Rogers, 2003).

One of the other concepts shared was how people emulate what they see. This idea also emerged in the literature when Wakefield and Talbert researched the NFA merger with FFA. Wakefield and Talbert (2003) found many of the former NFA members saw that when the merger occurred many African-American students no longer had role models who looked like them. Moore (1994) also speculated that this contributed to the lack of African Americans being enrolled in agricultural-science programs.

Some of the participants touched on the effects of the past, and this supported Morgan's (2000) findings that many of the older generation tell the youth about the hardships associated with Blacks working in agriculture and how that may effect the decision for them to pursue an agricultural degree. Brown's (1993) findings also were supported by the responses of this study's participants. Brown (1993) found many African-American students avoid agriculture because they have little or no knowledge about it and are not exposed to the agricultural careers available.

To reiterate theme one's implications, seeing more African Americans who have chosen to pursue a career in this industry could prove to be beneficial in encouraging more African-American youth to pursue a degree in agriculture. Agricultural programs also could publicize the success of African Americans in the industry to encourage more diversity. A couple of the participants also said they did not perceive the agricultural industry promoted the opportunities available to African Americans. If more agricultural programs targeted the African-American population more consistently, then the industry might begin to see the numbers grow.

Researchers could design a qualitative study, perhaps using focus groups, to examine the difference between African-American students who chose to pursue agriculture versus those who chose other majors. The dialogue between the two groups could help provide more information as to why the numbers of African Americans involved in agriculture are so small.

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

The participants expressed what needed to be done to see more African Americans enter the agricultural industry. Their ideas could help encourage more African Americans to pursue agricultural-related degrees: Universities and colleges should have successful African Americans in agriculture make presentations in predominately Black schools. Lewin's Gatekeeping Theory explains the role African Americans in agriculture could play in exposing African-American youth to agriculture and what it has to offer. African Americans involved in industry could create programs and distribute a portion of the information being delivered to African-American youth.

Many of these responses supported Moore's (1994) idea of the importance of African-American agricultural leaders to be present in the lives of African-American students. The participants expressed that people emulate what they see; so, if more African-American youth saw more African Americans active in this industry, they might want to learn more about it. The participants also discussed the idea that if more African Americans were exposed to the opportunities available in agriculture, they might be more likely to pursue related careers. This supports Brown's (1993) findings, as well.

The participants suggested the successful African Americans involved in agriculture should go into the communities and show Black youth their accomplishments. Going back could reinforce Wakefield's and Talbert's (2003) findings that when African-American youth have someone to look up to who looks like them, it makes a difference in their lives and could potentially help to increase African American involvement in agriculture.

Studies should be created 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 a more diverse student population.

Theme 5: Positive Effects and Perceptions Experienced While Involved in Agriculture

Participants shared many of the positive experiences agriculture had brought to their lives. They experienced support from their classmates and gained a sense of empowerment while involved in agriculture. Some of the participants talked about how agriculture helped keep them on the *right path*. This supports Balvanz et al. (2011) findings that when the older generation of African Americans was involved in agriculture, many of them experienced that if more Black youth got involved in agriculture, it would help them build work ethic and keep them out of trouble. With the experiences expressed by some of my participants, I saw this happen in their lives.

Wakefield and Talbert (2003) found many of the people who were involved in NFA perceived the program helped them develop better leadership skills. Balvanz et al. (2011) also addressed this concept in their study. Many of their participants explained that their experiences in agriculture had made them better entrepreneurs (Balvanz et al., 2011), showing that agriculture can have a positive impact on their lives of those involved in it, including African Americans. The statements of the participants supports this.

If agricultural programs could promote more of the positive aspects of agriculture and what it has to offer, this would show how the industry impacts the lives of its participants. Future research should examine the lives of African-American students positively affected by agriculture along with older African Americans who have made it

through this industry to explore how they overcame adversity. Having a study such as this available would help educators in promoting the positive factors that many African Americans do not associate with agriculture.

Theme 6: Negative Effects and Perceptions Experienced While Involved in Agriculture

Unfortunately, many of the participants had negative experiences while they have been involved in agriculture. They experienced, at times, the overwhelming perceptions of being the only African-American student in their classes, along with the pressures associated with that. One of the participants also described how she perceived many of her White peers had poor perceptions of African Americans and that affected the amount of exposure Blacks involved in agriculture received.

Many of the participants experienced being unconnected to their peers. Wakefield and Talbert (2003) also saw this pattern when learning about the NFA merger with FFA. The lack of leadership roles held by African Americans lowered the morale of Black students, which also played into the loss of connection perceived by the African-American students (Wakefield & Talbert, 2003).

Similar to Talbert's and Larke's (2012) findings and recommendations, universities and colleges should ensure their professors are equipped with the tools needed to teach a diverse audience. If the instructors are well prepared to help African Americans transition into an environment where they may feel alone, they may be able to help make this experience less uncomfortable. Creating a welcoming environment could also help encourage the African Americans who may be discouraged while pursuing their degrees.

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

Summary

Overall, the participants' experiences while involved in agriculture resonated with much of the literature and opened up many new areas where research can be conducted to help promote diversity in agriculture. The emergent themes also helped reinforce the theoretical framework of this project. Learning the motivations of the African-American students choosing agricultural-related majors helped expose layers of nuance and complexity comprising this phenomenon.

The essence revealed that the participants are driven by the goals and rewards of obtaining an agricultural-related degree. They have weighed the options available to them and, although hardships were encountered, they chose to stay on this path. We should continue to explore into the minds of African-American agriculturists and learn more about what drives them to participate in the agricultural industry. Using their experiences and thoughts ultimately could help encourage a new generation of African Americans to get involved in agriculture.

This study engaged the phenomenon of African-American experience in American agriculture past, present, and future. The results from studying this phenomenon can help higher education programs learn the best ways to attract and accommodate more African-American students. Future studies should continue to explore

how to improve diversity within the agricultural field, along with learning more about the achievements and strengths of the African Americans who excel in this industry.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, February 20, 2014
IRB Application No AG1358
Proposal Title: Examining the African American Perceptions of Agriculture: Visions of Students Attending An 1890 Land Grant Institution
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 2/19/2017

Principal Investigator(s):

Courtney P. Jordan 920 S Murray St Apt 12103 Stillwater, OK 74074	Nicholas R. Brown 458 Ag Hall Stillwater, OK 74078	Shelly Sitton 435 Ag Hall Stillwater, OK 74078
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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

**CONSENT FORM
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY**

PROJECT TITLE: Examining the African American Perceptions of Agriculture: Visions of Students Attending an 1862 Land Grant Institution

INVESTIGATORS: Courtney P. Jordan, Oklahoma State University Agricultural Communications Graduate Student; Nick Brown, Ph.D., Oklahoma State University

PURPOSE:

Research indicates that in recent years there has been a decline in African American representation in agricultural related fields. In order to help decrease the rate of the decline researchers must find the cause. In this project the researchers will study young African American adults in college and learn more about their attitudes when choosing their major. The purpose of study is to understand the characteristics of African American students who choose Agricultural Sciences fields to major in versus Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University. In order to achieve the purpose stated above, two objectives drive this study: (1) describe the essence of the lived experiences of African American students who are enrolled in Agricultural Sciences related majors at Oklahoma State University, (2) describe the essence of the lived experiences of African American students African American students who are enrolled in Natural Resources related majors at Oklahoma State University. The results from this study will help higher education institutions create better methods to help diversify Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources areas.

PROCEDURES:

Once a subject agrees to participate, the researcher will set up an interview that may take up to sixty-minutes, to take place in a private room on the Oklahoma State University campus. The interviews will be conducted by the primary investigator and recorded using a digital recording device. Interview recordings will be transcribed by the primary investigator. You will then receive a copy of the final interview and will be asked to read the report and notify (by email) the researchers if they feel their statements were misrepresented or misunderstood by the researchers and require correcting. The name of the university and all names of the subjects will be assigned pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality.

RISK OF PARTICIPATION:

There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life, also know that you do not have to do this. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You may stop at any time and end the conversation.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

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 versus other Natural Sciences.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The records of this study will be kept private. All written results will have pseudonyms and will not include information that will identify you. Only the PI (Courtney P. Jordan) and Co-PI (Nick Brown) will have access to data collected in this study. The list linking the names and pseudonyms will be saved on a password-protected computer and destroyed in July 2014. The computer will be kept under lock and key in the primary researcher's office. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed. When transcription is completed original recordings will be destroyed. Interview transcriptions will be used to prepare a written study report. Participants will be asked to read the transcript and notify (by email) the researchers if they feel their statements were misrepresented or misunderstood by the researchers in anyway. Participants will have 5 days from when they receive the transcripts created from their interview to review and respond with questions or concerns. If you do not respond within those 5 days the primary researcher will have the consent to proceed with the transcript created and proceed with the study with the transcribed materials. Next, all transcriptions will be deleted and removed from the researcher's computer. Data will be reported as directed quotes, but will be attributed to participants' pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and well being of people who participate in research.

CONTACTS: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your child's participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Courtney P. Jordan or Nick Brown, 458 Agricultural Hall, Dept. of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-2972.

If you have questions about your right's as a research volunteer, you may contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Dr. Shelia Kennison at 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

Your participation is voluntary, there is no penalty for their refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time, without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I affirm that I am 18 years or older. I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me.

Printed Name of Participant



Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Printed Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date



APPENDIX C: SAMPLE REMINDER EMAIL

Dear Student,

Hi, I am Courtney Jordan and I am an African American, female, currently pursuing a graduate degree in the Agricultural Communications program at Oklahoma State University and I sent you an email seven days ago asking for your participation in my research being conducting Oklahoma State University and this is just a follow up email to see if you may have any interest in participating. I am very interested in learning more about you and your decision to pursue a Agricultural Sciences or Natural Resources degree as an African American at Oklahoma State University. As a minority I feel it is very important for our voices to be heard, so I would love the opportunity to help share them. In order to do this, I would like to visit with you to learn more about the thoughts behind your decision.

Please know that you do not have to do this. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. You may stop at any time and end the conversation.

The records of this study will be kept private. All written results will have pseudonyms and will not include information that will identify you.

Please feel free to contact me if you are interested in participating in this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Courtney P. Jordan
Oklahoma State University

901-359-0699
courtpj@okstate.edu



APPENDIX D: THANK YOU EMAIL

Dear Student,

Hi, I am Courtney Jordan and I would like to send you a special thank you for taking the time to help me with my study. I really appreciate you giving me your time and for sharing your experiences with me. Again, the records of this study will be kept private. All written results will have pseudonyms and will not include information that will identify you.

Thank you again for your help!

Sincerely,

Courtney P. Jordan
Oklahoma State University

901-359-0699
court pj@okstate.edu



APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Phenomenology Interview Protocol
Courtney P. Jordan

Demographics of Subject

Name:

Age:

College Classification:

Ethnicity:

Major Guiding Questions:

Natural Resources Majors

1. Why did you choose a Natural Resources major?
2. What persuasive factors influenced your decision to choose a Natural Resources major?
3. Describe you experience in the (*industry of their natural resources major*)?
4. Do you have family or friends in the (*industry of their natural resources major*)?
5. If so, how this has their experiences influenced your choice to pursue a career in (*industry of their natural resources major*)?
6. If at all, how has the media influenced your career choice?
7. What are your career options in this field?
8. Do you already have a job secured after graduation?

Agriculture Majors

9. Why did you choose an Agricultural Sciences major?
10. What persuasive factors influenced your decision to choose an agricultural sciences & natural resources major?
11. Describe you experience in the agriculture industry?
12. Do you have family or friends in the agriculture industry?
13. If so, how have experiences influenced your choice to pursue a career in agriculture?
14. If at all, how has the media influenced your career choice?
15. What are your career options in this field?
16. Do you already have a job secured after graduation?

APPENDIX G: VITA

VITA

COURTNEY JORDAN

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

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

Major Field: Agricultural Communications

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK, in August, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN, in May, 2011.

Experience: Oklahoma State University Graduate College Graduate Research Assistant; Stillwater, OK Habitat for Humanity Intern.

Professional Memberships: Black Graduate Student Association; Graduate Students in Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership; Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources & Related Sciences