

The One-Way (Agri)Cultural Mirror: A Case Study of How Young Agricultural Leaders Understand and Experience Culture

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Abstract

As the global economy continues to advance, cultural competence has become a buzzword in education, professional development, and research. Despite this, little research has been devoted to understanding cultural competence in agriculture. Thus, a need emerged to describe the cultural competence of young agricultural leaders in Louisiana. Through data analysis, four themes emerged: (a) cultural anxiety, (b) cultural pressure, (c) the one-way (agri)cultural mirror, and (d) cultural lens expansion. The participants expressed anxiety to discuss cultural issues because of a fear of negative social ramifications. As a result, this yielded a pressure to adopt a culturally competent mindset to be successful. Additionally, participants recognized that the agricultural profession exhibited a unique cultural identity that produced a one-way cultural mirror whereby consumers and producers cannot understand one another. Because of this cultural barrier, participants recognized a need to expand their cultural lens, through domestic and international experiences, to better serve diverse populations. Therefore, we recommend that future research explore strategies that can cultivate cultural competence at earlier ages. For example, perhaps opportunities that feature cultural concepts could be offered more purposefully through 4-H, FFA, and Ag in the Classroom.

Keywords: agricultural leaders; cultural competence; leadership; production agriculture

Introduction and Review of Literature

Literature across various fields, including agriculture, has captured the motivations of culturally competent individuals; however, empirical evidence on cultural competence remains in its infancy (Gallus et al., 2014; Horvat et al., 2014; Moncloa et al. 2019; Suh, 2004). Cultural competence or cross-cultural competence (3C) has varying definitions depending on the context in which the

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phenomenon has been situated (Gay, 1994). The most accepted definition of cultural competence has been, “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross et al., 1989, p. 13).

Although terminology for cultural competence has been vague and disputed, previous research has cited an emergent need and motivation for the development of culturally competent individuals (Gallus et al., 2014). Despite this, few studies have been devoted to understanding cultural competence in the culturally diverse and globally integrated industry of agriculture ([Author Blinded]. 2020). Nevertheless, the economic, political, and social implications of globalization have pressured agriculture to evolve into an industry that has a more profound connection to the global economy (MacDonald et al., 2015; Robinson, 2018). Therefore, the agricultural industry has been called to improve the cultural competence of its workforce (Farm Aid, 2019).

Because of the scope and influence of globalization in agriculture, many industry-based organizations have advocated for the development of cultural competence in their membership, as well as the industry as a whole (Deen et al., 2014, Farm Aid, 2019; Moncloa et al., 2019). For agricultural producers, an emphasis on marketing and advertising has helped to reach a new generation of consumers with vast informational resources available through increased technology use (Mahaliyanaarachchi & Bandara, 2006). However, shifts in organizational culture can be challenging to implement and have been dependent on the organization’s ability to create an environment whereby desirable behaviors and attitudes can be fostered and accommodated (Chambers, 2005). Further, widespread industry shifts have been primarily dependent on an organization’s ability to strategically communicate sufficient information to those in the industry (Chambers, 2005; Glisson, 2007; Sun, 2009). One avenue poised to improve the agricultural industry’s cultural competence has been to begin at the source of the problem – the education of agriculturalists.

Because of this, agricultural education in the U.S. public education system has begun to recognize the need for culturally competent high school graduates (Grant, 2020; Vincent & Torres, 2015; Woods, 2004). The shifting demographics of the agricultural industry has also introduced a variety of cultural diversity issues such as ethnocentrism and cultural exclusion through educational policy, in which secondary agricultural education struggles to foster culturally competent graduates that have been prepared to operate in a globalized agricultural workforce (Grant, 2020; Vincent & Torres, 2015; Woods, 2004). For instance, Vincent and Torres (2015) discovered FFA chapter advisors who have a larger range of cultural diversity in their student organizations have been found to be more aware, knowledgeable, and prepared to accommodate students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, students in secondary agriscience programs can identify and recognize the educators’ levels of cultural competence when the standard of cultural competence has not been met (Vincent & Torres, 2015). Therefore, Vincent and Torres (2015) expressed a need for higher education institutions to better prepare preservice secondary agricultural educators to incorporate culturally competent teaching practices and perspectives in their curricula.

Although significant improvements have been made to expand educational opportunities in formal education, non-formal educational programs in various agricultural organizations have emerged to help educate professionals in the industry. In particular, the Cooperative Extension Service (CES),

an organization that promotes agricultural education, research, and professional development for youth and adults, has developed programs to improve the focus on globalization and cultural competence (Deen et al., 2014; Herndon et al., 2013; Monocloa et al., 2019). As an illustration, the systemic integration of culture through professional development opportunities has been shown to increase the cultural competence of agricultural systems (Braverman et al., 2012; Monocloa et al., 2019). Further, agriculturalists who are considered culturally competent have been found to be better prepared to address the needs of diverse cultural populations (Monocloa et al., 2019). To improve existing educational programs and foster the development of new professional development, a need existed to understand the status of cultural competence in the agricultural industry. Therefore, this investigation aimed to address this deficiency in knowledge by exploring the cultural competence of young agricultural leaders.

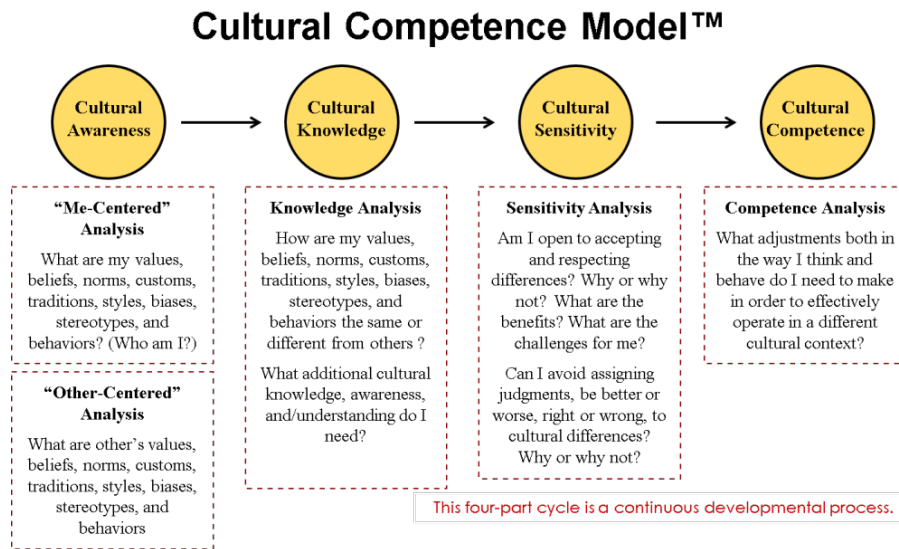
Conceptual Framework

The Winters Group (n.d.) cultural competence model™ described the stages an individual should undergo to reach and maintain cultural competence. The four components of this model are (a) cultural awareness, (b) cultural knowledge, (c) cultural sensitivity, and (d) cultural competence (Winters Group, n.d.). It is vital to note that progression through this model is consequential in nature, thus dependent on the individual's advancement through each phase. For example, an individual cannot progress to the next phase without completing all phases preceding it.

During the first stage of cultural awareness, an individual begins to question their beliefs, values, and cultural norms, as well as the beliefs, values, and cultural norms of other cultures ([Author Blinded], 2018; [Author Blinded], 2020, Winters Group, n.d.). Meanwhile, in the cultural knowledge phase, an individual begins to analyze the differences between their culture and the culture of others ([Author Blinded], 2018; Winters Group, n.d.). Further, through this analysis, an individual begins to realize what subsequent knowledge and understanding could be needed to better comprehend cultures they do not identify with, as well as their own cultural identity ([Author Blinded], 2018; Winters Group, n.d.). In the cultural sensitivity phase, an individual begins to analyze his or her own personal abilities to be accepting, open-minded, and tolerant of others' cultural beliefs, values, and norms ([Author Blinded], 2018; Winters Group, n.d.). During the final phase of cultural competence, an individual determines that ongoing modifications could be required to maintain a culturally competent personal and professional lifestyle ([Author Blinded], 2018; Winters Group, n.d.). Once an individual reaches the phase of cultural competence, they will maintain this stage, if a continual analysis is conducted regarding their awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity toward other cultures ([Author Blinded], 2018; Winters Group, n.d.). Figure 1 provides a visual description of the model.

Figure 1

Winters Group’s Cultural Competence Model



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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe how young agricultural leaders understood and experienced culture in Louisiana. Therefore, this investigation aligned with the American Association for Agricultural Education’s *Research Priority 7: Addressing Complex Problems* (Andenero et al., 2016). One research question guided this investigation: What was the cultural competence of young agricultural leaders in Louisiana?

Methodology

This qualitative investigation was grounded in Stake’s (1995) instrumental case study approach. To accomplish this, we examined the case of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation Young Farmers and Ranchers program to provide insight into the phenomenon. In accordance with Stake’s (1995) approach, this investigation was bound by program, place, and time. For example, the participants in this study were members of the Young Farmers and Ranchers Program in Louisiana from 2020 to 2021.

Case Selection and Description

We selected the population of interest because of their heavy engagement in production agriculture in Louisiana. Louisiana has an economically and culturally vibrant agricultural industry with over 27,400 farms in operation in 2019 (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], n.d.). In Louisiana, the agricultural population has been considered more culturally more diverse than the national average (Bunch et al., 2018; USDA, 2014a). Although the statewide racial diversity is higher, Louisiana struggles with diversity in other aspects of culture, such as inclusivity of gender. For example, gender diversity in principal farm operators in Louisiana has been well below the

national average, with females making up 12.3% and males 87.7% (USDA NASS, 2014b). In this investigation, the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation Young Farmers and Ranchers (SFBFYFR) members were highly connected socially, professionally, and politically to the agricultural industry in Louisiana. As such, this was an ideal population to better understand the cultural competence of young agricultural leaders in Louisiana. This study’s population included the young agriculturalists who were members of the SFBFYFR. Eligibility for membership included: (a) age 18-35, (b) Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation member or family of a Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation member, and (c) partially or actively engaged in agriculture. Because of a lack of organizational record-keeping, the total number of individual program participants was unknown; however, approximately 100 individuals annually attend the annual SFBFYFR Leadership Conference. The participant pseudonyms, demographics, and personal and professional characteristics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants’ Personal and Professional Characteristics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Job Title	Industry
Amy	Female	34	Caucasian	Extension Agent	Non-formal Education
Paul	Male	34	Caucasian	Farm Owner and Manager	Crop Production
Tom	Male	27	Hispanic	Loan Officer	Agriculture Finance
Mary	Female	28	Caucasian	Secondary Agricultural Educator	Formal Public Education
John	Male	23	Caucasian	Cattle Herdsman	Cattle Production

Data Collection

To reach the target population, we contacted the SFBFYFR to recruit participants using a criterion-based sampling procedure (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through an organizational liaison, we contacted members via email to solicit their participation in the study. Additionally, we utilized a snowball sampling method, in which participants were then nominated by other individuals in SFBFYFR who might fit the study’s population parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In total, five volunteers agreed to participate. Because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, face-to-face interviews were conducted through Zoom video conferencing software. Using email correspondence, informed consent for participation was obtained. Once consent was obtained, individual interviews were scheduled with each participant based on their availability. During the interview, participants were asked questions such as, “What does culture mean to you?” “What are your experiences professionally with other cultures?” “From your perspective, what are the attributes of a culturally competent individual in the agricultural industry?” Each participant interview was less than one hour in duration. However, it should be noted that each participant

engaged in follow-up interviews to clarify their statements and provide greater detail. The interviews were audio-recorded on a separate, password-protected device, transcribed verbatim via Descript transcription software, and reviewed to ensure congruence and accuracy. During the collection of the data, interview notes regarding the setting and emotions of participants were also captured.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, three rounds of coding were implemented to emerge the findings. We utilized first cycle coding methods, second cycle coding methods, and thematic analysis to emerge four themes and three subthemes describing the cultural competence and cultural experiences of participants (Saldaña, 2021). The first cycle coding approach we used was values coding (Saldaña, 2021). According to Saldaña (2021), values coding allows for participants' underlying worldviews and perspectives to become emergent to the researcher. To utilize this approach, we read through each interview transcript to derive the intrinsic attitudes, values, and beliefs expressed by the participants when discussing cultural competence in the agricultural industry in Louisiana. We also employed InVivo coding as a first cycle coding approach to describe data using the exact words of participants (Saldaña, 2021). InVivo coding is often used when researching topics such as culture, due to the description of data through culture-specific vocabulary (Saldaña, 2021). Through this coding cycle, 1,147 unique codes emerged. Finally, descriptive coding was implemented because of the approach's versatility to analyze different forms of data (Saldaña, 2021). Using the descriptive coding approach, 391 codes emerged. Examples of the descriptive codes included: "diversity presence in Louisiana;" "share the professional culture of agriculture;" "advocacy for agriculture;" "domestic travel influences professional skill;" and "apprehension of the topic."

During the second cycle of coding, we used axial coding to reduce the open codes into categories. Through this coding approach, axial codes were then patterned into relevant categories. Nine axial code categories were developed through this process. Examples of axial codes included: "travel influence;" "cultural competence progression;" and "diversity in Louisiana agricultural production." After the first and second cycle coding process, we used thematic analysis to story the data and interpret the axial codes into emergent themes. To accomplish this, we met as a team to negotiate axial codes into a coherent story of data. As a result of this process, four themes and three subthemes emerged that were interpreted through the Winters Group (n.d.) cultural competence model.

Reflexivity and Qualitative Quality

To accurately represent the research findings, an explanation of our biases and experiences regarding cultural competence and the data should be addressed. We are advocates of culturally competent systems and the progression of culturally competent ideals in agriculture, including education, production, and business. It is critical to understand that these factors may have influenced the interpretation of data to favor the continued establishment and progression of cultural competence in the agricultural industry. To reduce these influences, Tracy's (2010) model for excellent qualitative research was employed at all stages of the research process. Tracy (2010) stated that the following must be present in a qualitative study to be considered excellent research:

(a) worthy topic; (b) rich rigor; (c) sincerity; (d) credibility; (e) resonance; (f) significant contribution; (g) ethics; and (h) meaningful coherence. Through the meticulous adherence to Tracy's (2010) qualitative quality standards, this investigation achieved its purpose by maintaining rigorous and ethical decision-making.

Findings

Through our analysis, four themes emerged that represented how the culture was understood and experienced by young agricultural leaders in Louisiana: (a) cultural anxiety, (b) cultural pressure, (c) the one-way (agri)cultural mirror, and (d) cultural lens expansion.

Theme #1: Cultural Anxiety

Throughout this investigation, the participants expressed apprehension and cultural anxiety when articulating differences regarding the cultural competence of professionals in the agricultural industry. This cultural anxiety appeared to be a result of a perceived social risk associated with the discussion of cultural topics. For example, participants noted their own and others' hesitancy to discuss culture because they feared social ramifications. One concerned participant, Mary, was initially worried about the "angle" of the research. Further, she was visibly closed off at the beginning of the interview. She explained this behavior had to do with the uncertainty of social perception from others. Mary explained: "I brought it up to my friends outside of YF&R [Young Farmers and Ranchers], and unfortunately, in today's social media culture, it's just not something that anyone wants to touch with a ten-foot pole."

This perceived anxiety surrounding culturally focused conversations appeared to surface as participants hoped to avoid discussing the topic. Mary, further explained: "I feel like a lot of people don't know how to ask or how to approach a topic because they don't want to be perceived as insensitive or ignorant." Participants appeared to prefer avoidance of the topic of cultural differences to mitigate the risk of offending others of a different cultural identity. Another participant, Paul, argued: "You can offend somebody... You can upset a person through their culture very easily over one little thing." This sentiment was echoed by other participants who, when asked what they do when cultural differences do not align with their personal beliefs, explained they usually avoided the culture altogether. Amy explained that when operating in a culturally diverse setting: "I'm not going to preach that your culture is wrong, I usually just avoid it." Tom agreed with this belief, "I try my best to avoid the subject [of cultural differences] with the person... differences... stay away from them." As a consequence, anxiety and avoidance to discuss cultural topics for fear of the negative ramifications weighed heavily on participants' minds, actions, and beliefs when considering their interactions with other cultures.

Theme #2 – Cultural Pressure

The young agricultural leaders in this study noted that extrinsic motivation and professional pressure to be a culturally competent individual existed in the agricultural industry in Louisiana. For example, all five young agriculturalists in this investigation noted the indisputable presence of different forms of cultural diversity, including nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, and native language in the industry. As John explained: "Every farm is culturally diverse... all across the state of Louisiana. I don't think it matters what community you go to."

The young agricultural leaders also seemed to desire cultural competence largely because of social pressure to adapt to this standard. For example, agriculturalists perceived not being culturally competent could negatively affect their reputation, decrease employee job satisfaction, and possibly decrease their potential revenues. As a result of this extrinsic pressure, the participants expressed a desire to achieve a culturally competent mindset and began to value different perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors of other agricultural professionals and organizations. John pensively explained, “You need to be more accepting sometimes and ask some questions or try to think about it from their perspective... I try to be accepting of everybody... If I’m not familiar with their customs, I want to talk to them about it and just learn more.” This sentiment was echoed by Amy, who explained, “You try to research as much as possible and try to adapt to their cultures, as much as possible.” Tom distinctly added, “I’ve never thought any different of anybody due to what their beliefs are.” When asked if others in the agricultural industry value cultural competency, Tom explained, “I know wholeheartedly they believe the same way I do”.

Throughout data collection, the participants described the importance of learning to navigate a culturally diverse industry, such as agriculture, because of the increased quantity of foreign labor sources. The young agricultural leaders also noted that a lack of cultural competence would only damage personal business revenue, social standing, and the agricultural industry as a whole. Mary expressively stated that cultural competence was “just basic human decency.” She added that if an agriculturalist in Louisiana did not value cultural competence, they would keep their opinions of such matters private. Mary freely explained: “I feel like if they don’t [value cultural competence], that’s something that would be said behind closed doors... They would at least fake it. That’s not socially acceptable.” With a large percentage of immigrant labor in the agricultural industry, cultural competence in the industry seemed to be fostered by an extrinsic motivation to optimize personal and financial gain. The young agricultural leaders also appeared to be professionally pressured into the acceptance of other cultures. As John maintained: “I think that if a farmer, or any employer for that matter, didn’t respect the people who work for them, they wouldn’t be employers. Nobody would want to work for somebody who is just a derogatory all the time.” Despite this, the young agricultural leaders primarily seemed to value cultural competence when it directly influenced their businesses. This sentiment was expressed by Amy, who stated:

Being knowledgeable about other cultures will help them [agricultural employers] in the long run. Whether it is making their job easier or better for the bottom line. I mean, it does someone no good to be culturally illiterate if you have to work with foreign workers all the time.

Therefore, the participants recognized that cultural competence was critical to them professionally, personally, and financially in the agricultural industry in Louisiana. While expressing verbal and visible hesitance, anxiety, and avoidance to discuss topics related to culture, participants, although not internally driven, expressed a motivation and willingness to learn more about other cultures and discuss cultural differences. With a motivation for cultural competence in the agricultural industry in Louisiana present, these young agricultural leaders expressed their cultural attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives in the agricultural industry were primarily extrinsically influenced because of cultural pressure.

Theme #3 – The One-Way (Agri)Cultural Mirror

Although the participants reported feeling pressure, they also argued that agriculture was a separate and distinct cultural group, and they believed the public should make a greater effort to understand their unique intricacies rather than adapting to the expectations of others. As a result, the third theme emerged in the form of a metaphor: *The One-Way Cultural Mirror*. When consumers look through the one-sided mirror, they observe agriculturalists from afar and make judgments based on sociocultural norms. However, when the young agriculturalists in this study looked through the mirror, they could only see themselves and their profession through their own experiences which made it difficult to understand the values and traditions of others. As a result, a disconnect emerged by which agriculturalists and the general public struggled to understand one another, which has greatly hindered agricultural literacy efforts. For example, when discussing the culture of agriculture, the young agricultural leaders in this study expressed pride and reverence for the industry because they perceived it upheld family, religion, and shared professional values. As John proudly described, “I find agriculture is its own culture of people... We might not have the same skin color and the same beliefs, but we’re all a really underappreciated group of people.” Tom effortlessly described the culture and lifestyle of agriculture as “family-oriented,” “religious,” and “caring.” He explained, “family values and religion meld really good with agriculture”.

Because participants in this study identified agriculture as a unique cultural group, they also acknowledged that the profession has experienced challenges connecting with its consumers. For example, the young agricultural leaders in this investigation largely did not understand the perspectives of their consumers. Mary noted that this one-way cultural view can often be identified through the public perceptions of labor practices in agricultural production. She described her frustration by explaining: “people [who are] not in agriculture assume that when we have immigrant labor, that they’re illegal Mexicans and we’re paying them under the table. And that just couldn’t be further from the truth in any form around here.” Aggravated by the perceived ignorance of consumers, the young agricultural leaders also noted that the one-sided cultural mirror exacerbated existing challenges regarding communication with the public. Further, the participants perceived that their consumers were unable to understand the professional culture of agriculture. This dichotomy further contributed to participants of this investigation believing that consumers have difficulty expressing their desires and expectations about agriculture because of their consumers’ inability to turn the mirror around and see through their perspective.

Despite this, several of the participants did articulate a way forward. For instance, Tom explained that as an agriculturalist, he aimed “to be more of an advocate for what [he] believes in and what [he] sees day today.” He further illuminated: “I can help to bridge that gap.” Tom clarified that as a part of his agricultural finance position, he gets the opportunity to help educate consumers during informational agricultural events. He enlightened his distress at the lack of agricultural literacy in his community by arguing: “I have kids come in and not know what rough rice looks like... And not just kids, grown adults don’t know what it is.” Participants in this study also expressed a necessity for the different sides, producers and consumers, to be competent of one another to foster more understanding collectively. Paul explained that when operating in a culturally diverse setting, effort to progress cultural competence must be, unequivocally, “on both sides.” Additionally, he believed that it must be a reciprocal effort to cross-language, communication, and cultural perspective barriers. He explained, “we [as producers] got to know a little bit [about consumers].” Because of the lack of cultural competence on both sides, it has led to the establishment of a one-

way agricultural mirror that hinders the ability of production agriculturalists to market commodities to a consumer population, who predominantly lack agricultural literacy. As Tom optimistically explained: “I think we can do a better job. I think we need to be more aware when we come out with a product and how to represent that to the public to ensure they know what we’re talking about.”

Although there was a strong desire for producers to advocate for their way of life, as consumers shifted further from their agrarian roots, agriculturalists were left to speculate how to best relay commodity information and professional perspectives across this cultural barrier to effectively market agricultural products. Tom described how the agricultural industry has made efforts to improve agricultural literacy, the cultural understanding of consumers, and mitigating misconceptions about agricultural practices. Tom felt strongly that the profession of agriculture has been actively trying to break the one-way cultural mirror between agriculturalists and consumers. In a hopeful tone, he explained, “they’re [American Farm Bureau Federation] taking massive strides and trying to teach and reach out and trying to be involved with the community, as much as they can.” As a result, participants in this study believed the agricultural industry had its own unique, professional culture that was distinctly different from the culture of consumers. Nevertheless, the young agricultural leaders realized there was a need to illuminate this one-way cultural mirror by bridging the communication, knowledge, and cultural barriers between the two groups. Because of this, agriculturalists were expanding their cultural lens to accommodate a new consumer demographic that had been largely removed from agricultural production.

Theme #4 – Cultural Lens Expansion

In the final theme, cultural lens expansion, the young agricultural leaders reported making strides to expand their cultural lens and alter their perspectives of other cultures through three emergent subthemes: (a) education, (b) domestic experiences, and (c) international experiences. Each experience, although varying in contextual applicability, allowed young agriculturalists to progress their cultural understanding further. Participants noted how vastly culturally and educationally distinctive each experience was, compared to one another.

Subtheme 1 - Cultural Lens Expansion Through Education. From an educational perspective, agriculturalists in this study described how their cultural lens was initially developed and expanded through their formal educational experiences. As John gratefully described, “growing up in schools where other ethnicities are present, they [the school] did a good job of trying to get them [individuals of other cultures] to share information about their culture.” This cultural exposure was further extended as agriculturalists advanced their education in higher educational institutions. Amy noted that she never realized that she possessed her own cultural identity before beginning her collegiate educational career. She explained, “I guess college is probably when I started learning about other people’s traditions and learning that I had traditions I had no idea about.” Participants in this investigation appeared grateful that their cultural experiences in formal education allowed them to elevate their cultural awareness and knowledge through exposure to cultural diversity from a young age. With this foundation, young agricultural leaders entered the workforce prepared to further expand their cultural lens.

Subtheme 2 - Cultural Lens Expansion Through Domestic Experiences. From a professional standpoint, the participants began to develop their cultural perspectives as they entered the agricultural workforce. In particular, the young agricultural leaders described how domestic and international travel experiences were equally advantageous yet varied in applicability, depending on the context. When asked if domestic or international experiences were more beneficial, Tom reflected: “Both have been influential in my life. They’ve been influential differently, but to the same magnitude for me.” Additionally, the young agricultural leaders noted that domestic experiences were more impactful to their agricultural businesses because of the direct applicability of agricultural knowledge they gained in their respective industries. Mary, a high school agricultural educator, explained that her domestic experiences in agriculture allowed her to gain insight for her career in the public education system. She explained: “Professionally, domestic trips [were more beneficial] because as a teacher...it means this was more relatable and more teachable when I have experiences in the country.” This sentiment for domestic experiences possessing the ability to increase agricultural content knowledge was echoed among participants. Paul noted the professional significance of domestic travel experiences by explaining: “The United States trips is where, in my line of work, I see more benefit, because I will have more interaction and more sales conversations that go back and forth and sharing information.”

Subtheme 3 - Cultural Lens Expansion Through International Experience. Although domestic travel experiences were beneficial for gaining direct agricultural knowledge, participants noted that international-based experiences were more beneficial on a personal level to cultivate cultural awareness, knowledge, sensitivity, and competence. Paul enthusiastically explained: “The international trips gave me so much more perspective on life...But I don’t know at this point how much it will benefit me in my business world.” Participants saw profound value in experiencing other cultures, even though the experiences were applied to their daily life differently based on the domestic or international context. Domestic experiences were seen as more critical for business, whereas international experiences were seen as more valuable for the personal development of cultural competence. However, all participants in this investigation had intentionally strived to increase their cultural competence to develop themselves as professionals in the agricultural industry in Louisiana.

Conclusions, Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand how young agricultural leaders understood and experienced culture in Louisiana. Through our analysis of data, our findings generated several important conclusions, implications, and recommendations for the future. First, we conclude that participants considered cultural competence integrated, vital, and valued in Louisiana’s agricultural industry. This finding does not appear to have previously been reported in the literature. We also conclude that the participants perceived extrinsic pressure to adopt a culturally competent mindset to succeed professionally, financially, and socially – a sentiment that does not appear to have been reported. Because of this, we conclude that the young agricultural leaders were in the cultural awareness and cultural knowledge phases of the Winters Group (n.d.) cultural competence model. Therefore, although externally motivated, participants recognized the need for cultural competence. As such, we recommend that future research explore ways to motivate young agriculturalists to become more culturally competent intrinsically. Additionally, we conclude that participants first initiate their journey to cultural competence through exposure to cultural

diversity, and subsequent cultural awareness, in secondary and collegiate education systems. This finding aligned with the work of other in the literature (Grant, 2020; O'Malley et al., 2019; Pigg et al., 2020, 2021; Roberts & Edwards, 2016; Woods, 2004).

Although participants in this investigation valued cultural competence, we conclude that cultural anxiety existed because of a perceived social risk of discussing cultural concepts – a view that has not previously been explored. This phenomenon appeared to materialize as avoidance to discuss the topic of culture altogether. Consequently, this finding further substantiated that participant operated in the cultural awareness and knowledge phase of cultural competence (Winters Group, n.d.). However, it should be noted that the young agricultural leaders seemed aware and possessed a rudimentary knowledge of diverse cultures, yet they did not seek to become culturally sensitive (Rampold et al., 2020). Additionally, we conclude that participants believed that the agricultural industry was a unique cultural group that desired greater understanding by consumers. For example, the participants viewed themselves as a separate cultural group and recognized that agricultural commodity consumers were unaware and unable to understand their professional culture. Further, the participants noted that this barrier presented challenges when communicating and marketing agricultural products to consumers who did not appreciate the culture of agricultural production. As such, we recommend that future research explore how to bridge the rift between agricultural producers and consumers. We further recommend that social media campaigns be developed to provide greater insight into the unique perspectives of each group.

On this point, the participants did note that professional development was available regarding cultural competence in Louisiana through organizations, such as Cooperative Extension and the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation. However, they believed that programming should be tailored and offered to a younger audience through 4-H and FFA (Jackson & Roberts, 2021; LeJeune & Roberts, 2020). Lastly, we conclude that domestic travel experiences were impactful for knowledge expansion. In contrast, international experiences were beneficial when cultivating and progressing cultural competence in professionals in the industry in Louisiana. Although the participants valued domestic and international travel opportunities equally, they found more professional applicability in domestic experiences and more personal cultural competence development in experiences abroad. Moving forward, we recommend that professional development programs use domestic and international travel opportunities strategically to cultivate cultural competence outcomes (Winters Group, n.d.). For instance, domestic experiences could be used when the desired outcome is to expand knowledge and awareness about culture (Winters Group, n.d.). Alternatively, international experiences could be used when the desired outcome is the development of cultural sensitivity and progression of cultural competence for participants (Winters Group, n.d.). We also recommend that a cultural competence program be developed and implemented for agricultural youth to introduce cultural diversity and cultural exploration at an earlier age (Jackson & Roberts, 2021). The young agricultural leaders in this study recognized efforts in the agricultural industry to progress cultural competence; however, they believed that beginning this education at an earlier age could better foster culturally competent adults as they enter the agricultural workforce.

Regarding recommendations for research, we recommend using a similar qualitative methodology to pursue this inquiry in various states, regions, and countries to investigate the influence of local context. Further, scholars should conduct additional research to describe better the motivations,

levels, and expectations of cultural competence in the industry of agriculture. There is a lack of literature surrounding cultural competence in agriculture; therefore, pursuing additional investigations could further substantiate the findings and implications of the present study and build the knowledge base in this area. Additionally, supplemental research should be conducted with the purpose of investigating cultural avoidance, anxiety, and pressure in the agricultural industry to discern personal, organizational, and social approaches to counteract these barriers and promote culturally competent discussions. Lastly, additional research should be conducted regarding the one-way (agri)cultural mirror that participants in this investigation perceived existed between consumers and agriculturalists to discern possible strategies and programs to illuminate this barrier and promote cultural competence.

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