

Perceived Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Across the US Agriculture Industry: From the Lived
Experiences of Gay Men

Michael Granché

Major Project/Report submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Online Master of Agricultural and Life Sciences
In
Leadership Studies

Curtis Friedel & Department of Agriculture, Leadership, and Community Education
Co-Chair of Advisory Committee
Katherine Knowlton & Department of Dairy Science
Co-Chair of Advisory Committee
Mary Rodriguez & Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership
External Member

September 12, 2021

Keywords: Leadership, LGBTQ, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity

Acknowledgments

I've received so much help and support throughout the entire research and writing process of this body of work. There were several moments where I questioned if I'd be able to finish this successfully- not just to complete it- but to craft this in a way that actually helps serve and uplift LGBTQIA+ agriculturalists. Thanks to an incredible team, months of collaboration, and frequent visits to Starbucks, I'm incredibly proud to share this report into the world.

I want to first thank Dr. Curtis Friedel, Dr. Katherine Knowlton, and Dr. Mary Rodriguez for all of their help and input. Their expertise was invaluable in shaping a (really) rough concept into a completed piece that I'm incredibly proud of. You all challenged me to push harder and think deeper, while empowering me to take creative liberties and write this in a tone that's authentic to me. I want to also thank Jennifer Jones; I genuinely could have never completed my graduate degree without your constant advising and encouragement.

I would like to also thank my colleagues at the National Corn Growers Association, specifically; Sarah, Jim, Mel, Stacey, Rita, Julie, Nicole, and Sara. Thanks for cheering me on, asking me how things were coming along, and always being patient when I had to skip leisure plans to continue working. It's a privilege to work alongside each of you and an even larger blessing to call you a friend.

I also want to thank my friends Autumn, Anna, Steph, and Lydia (and of course Cooper, my faithful Golden Retriever) for letting me recite nearly every iteration of this report without interruption. Not only did you all balance compliments and critiques for such an intimate piece of writing, but you did it with grace and heart and for that, I'm forever grateful.

I want to thank my parents, Craig and Gigi, brothers Alex and Ryan, and my partner Stanley for all of their love and support both mentally and emotionally. You all were always

there to help ground me and believed I could do this from the second I decided to submit my grad school application. Looking back, it's hard to believe that I started this journey interning in D.C., to find myself working in the agriculture industry, doing exactly what I prayed for, just three years later in St. Louis.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone who reads this report. Cultural transformation takes an army but often starts with just one person. It will be an uphill battle and progress will be slow but trust in the process and don't lose sight of why this work matters. The world is changing all around us, yet the exponential need for sustainable food, fuel, and fiber is unwavering. It's going to take the best bodies and minds to rise to the challenge and we need to make sure that there's room for everyone at the table. Thank you for your passion to agriculture, commitment to curiosity, and willingness to explore a perspective that may greatly differ from your own. This report is not to point blame but instead, a means of taking a necessary pulse check on how diversity, equity, and inclusion are perceived through the eyes of gay men working in agriculture.

Go Hokies,

Michael Granché

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Statement of Reflexivity	6
Chapter One: Introduction	8
Background and Setting	8
Statement of the Problem	10
Purpose of the Study.....	11
Project Objectives.....	11
Definition of Terms.....	12
Limitations of the Study	12
Basic Assumptions	13
Significance of the Problem	13
Chapter Two: Literature and Theoretical Framework.....	14
Stigma and Discrimination	14
Social Identity Theory	15
Chapter Three: Methodology Section	17
Research Design	17
Participants Selection	18
Instrumentation and Data Collection	19
Trustworthiness.....	20
Data Analysis.....	20
Timeline and Materials.....	21
Chapter Four: Findings.....	21
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations	33
Conclusions.....	33
Recommendations for Practice.....	36
Recommendations for Future Research	39
References.....	41
Appendix A	43
Appendix B	44
MEMORANDUM.....	44
IRB NUMBER: 21-188.....	44

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:..... 44**Abstract**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, approximately 22 million people work in the agriculture industry and in 2018, this figure represented roughly 11% of the total American workforce. Of these 22 million people, it is indisputable that some unknown percentage of them are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual+ people. With an exponentially growing population, now more so than ever before, the importance of a robust and socially sustainable workforce responsible for the food we eat is undeniable. In order for the agriculture industry to excel today while meeting the demands of tomorrow, it will require the best talent available and will require all agriculturalists to work collaboratively together. This phenomenological study tells the career stories thus far of ten white, gay, cisgender male agriculturalists. A keystone of Social Identity Theory is that the entire world around us can be divided into two groups, groups that we belong to and groups that we do not. By utilizing Social Identity Theory, we can see that gay men who work in agriculture have not always felt a part of the ingroup, and by default have been placed in the excluded outgroup, or the “them”. Social Identity Theory tells us that our group membership greatly impacts not only our pride, but our self-esteem (McLeod, 2019) which both can impact long-term talent retention and turnover rates for employers. The objective of this study was to explore the perceived levels of diversity, equity, and inclusion from the perspective of gay males who work within the industry through semi-structured interviews. This research concludes that the agriculture industry is not found to be diverse or inclusive based on the lived experiences of study participants. Additionally, this study offers recommendations for those in leadership roles within the industry to help create a more equitable environment for all agriculturalists.

Statement of Reflexivity

I enter this conversation as an openly gay, cis-gender, white man, relatively new in his career. I'm currently 25 years old, "masculine" presenting, and come from an upper middle-class family, glued strongly together by my college educated parents who have been together since they were in high school. I grew up on my family's small beef and pork farm in Virginia and quickly found my passion for agriculture through my time in 4H and FFA. I carry a mass of privilege with me into every room, every space, and every network that I enter. I frequently consider myself to be "incognito diversity" because at first glance, most don't know or assume my identity as gay. I've actually had many uncomfortable situations where strangers will share rude, hateful comments with me about other strangers in the room who aren't fortunate enough to be straight passing or an acceptable level of gay- whatever that means. Should I choose to correct the individual and out myself in the process, I'm almost always immediately met with some iteration of "well, you're not *that* gay." I've pondered this notion for many years now, wondering how one's level of perceived 'gayness' is calculated. Is this linked to my Body Mass Index (BMI)? Perhaps a function of my credit score? Surely, it's my shirt or was it something I said?

My last year of undergrad, I was asked to speak on a diversity in agriculture round table. I immediately denied the invitation because I didn't think I was diverse enough to speak on this important topic, almost to a degree that I feared inevitable imposter syndrome. It's taken me several years of experience navigating difficult conversations, an unwavering commitment to selflove and daily positive affirmations but I've now realized that the privilege I carry makes me an ideal candidate to bridge these conversations and help make the agriculture industry more diverse, inclusive, and equitable for everyone who's interested in feeding, fueling, and clothing an exponentially growing global population. My whiteness paired with my able body and

masculine gender presentation allows me to connect with older, straight, white men without triggering their inherent flight response to avoid conversations about diversity.

I had a relatively low drama coming out experience my freshman year of college. I had known since elementary school but was deeply buried under the clothes in my closet and had a difficult time accepting this part of myself. Besides one random woman at the D.C. train station who told me on the last day of my summer internship that I'd burn hell for my "choice", the drama free trend has fortunately carried over into my adult life as an out gay man. Through these interviews, I learned three key things: A) My story really isn't that unique, I found a lot of myself in the stories these men shared with me. B) I'm very fortunate to have family, friends, and an employer who all accept me and take no issue with my identity. C) There's an incredible community of welcoming and supportive gay men in agriculture who all see our lived struggles of yesterday as areas of opportunity for tomorrow.

To quote the great E.M. Tiffany, "I believe in the future of agriculture, with a faith born not of words but of deeds- achievements won by the present and past generations of agriculturalists; in the promise of better days through better ways, even as the better things we now enjoy have come to us from the struggles of former years." I do believe in the future of agriculture, our shared future as global citizens, but make no mistake; our success is not guaranteed. It's going to take the work, pride, and passion of agriculturalists across the world working together to sustainably tackle the challenges of tomorrow. The farmer- gay, straight, man, woman, black, white, trans, cis, democrat, republican, born citizen or immigrant- is both a powerful and equally talented person. Talent is talent regardless of the societal packaging it comes in and rising tides lifts all boats.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background and Setting

The agriculture industry as a collective has continued to publicly recognize the need for diversity across its' workforce. However, issuing blanket statements regarding the importance of diversity and promoting diverse voices and perspectives, does not necessarily mean that one can find true inclusion, nor equity across the industry. Organizations such as the Cultivating Change Foundation, founded in 2016, work to raise awareness of LGBTQ people across the industry, citing their mission as “valuing and elevating LGBT agriculturists through advocacy, education, and community.”

According to the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, roughly 22 million people work in the US agriculture industry. In 2018, this number represented roughly 11 percent of total US employment. (Agriculture and Its Related Industries Provide 10.9 Percent of U.S. Employment, 2020). With so many people and industries dependent off of the agriculture industry and its' work force, it is disproportionate in how little is known regarding the inclusiveness of gay men and their lived career experiences whilst working in the agriculture field. With 22 million people holding occupations in agriculture, it is highly likely that an unknown percentage of them are indeed males that identify as gay. Though this exact percentage is not yet fully known, a sampling of interview data from gay male agriculturists is a first step in dissecting the many layers to this complex onion that represents the perceived inclusion and equity found within the U.S. agriculture industry.

A 2019 report published by the LGBTQ think tank Movement Advancement Project claimed that up to five percent of rural American residents are members of the LGBTQ community. (Movement Advancement Project. Where We Call Home: LGBT People in Rural

America, 2019). This would equate to 3.8 million gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people calling rural America ‘home’. Unsurprisingly, there is a gap between urban and rural America regarding the school climate for LGBTQ youth. The study also found that almost 60 percent of LGBTQ urban youth reported having a gay-straight alliance club whereas this figure dramatically drops to only 36 percent in rural communities. This lack of inclusiveness and education focused on diversity across rural communities quickly opens the door for discrimination against rural LGBTQ people, thus negatively impacting self-identity. This problem grows even deeper for LGBTQ youth in agricultural education. Students face significant challenges such as educators ill prepared to meet their needs, a lack of policies to inform decision making, and active homophobia from teachers and peers. (Murray, Trexler, Cannon, 2020). Living in rural America doesn’t always involve working in agriculture, though undoubtedly, one will always find agriculture within rural communities. By introducing youth to LGBTQ education, the foundation is set to foster more inclusive environments which may spark genesis to the manifestation of more progressive mindsets within rural America. These mindsets would enable LGBTQ Americans to feel more comfortable and included within rural spaces thus, potentially impacting agricultural employment in a positive way. More LGBTQ people would feel empowered to remain in their rural communities, possibly seeking agricultural occupations, if they felt safe and valuable to farm and agribusiness success.

Many agree that LGBTQ rights are human rights, in fact according to GLAAD, eight in ten Americans support equal rights for LGBTQ people. (GLAAD’s 2019 Accelerating Acceptance Index: Results Show Further, 2019). However, not only is inclusion ethical, it also impacts employee performance. “Perceived inclusion generates pro-social group behaviors and positive psychological outcomes for employees such as job satisfaction, organization-based self-

esteem, and organizational citizenship behavior” (Cottrill et al., 2014; Bortree and Waters, 2014; Jansen et al., 2014; Mor Barak, 2017). By better understanding the level of perceived inclusivity, managers may have a more accurate gauge of employee job satisfaction which is directly linked to talent retention in the workplace.

More research is needed to accurately determine the overall level of diversity, perceived inclusion, and equity for LGBTQ people in the agriculture industry. With such dramatic gaps in existing literature regarding LGBTQ agriculturalists, this project and report is best served to explicitly focus on gay men who hold agricultural occupations. The lived experiences of gay men working in various occupations across the agriculture industry will be collected and analyzed through this study in hopes of furthering existing literature and ultimately impacting managerial decisions at the organizational level to help create and foster more inclusive environments. For this project and report; diversity will be defined as the presence of difference, inclusion will be defined as the sensation of feeling welcomed and sense of belonging, and equity will be defined as equal access to opportunity.

Statement of the Problem

It is of critical importance to better explore and understand the real state of the agriculture industry when it comes to the diversity, inclusion, and equity within. Extremely often, the agriculture industry and those who work within it, are criticized and labeled to be “ignorant” and “bigoted” but is this really the case? Surely, it wouldn’t be appropriate for a member of the majority (straight, white, cis-gender male) to answer this question, so research aimed at explaining the reality of minorities on the inside of the industry is nothing under imperative. Without uncovering and investigating the truth, it will be impossible to intentionally implement

reformation or any tangible structural change, that would help advance the industry's diversity, inclusivity, or equity.

Equity cannot be obtained without the acknowledgment of diversity and inclusion. However, equity isn't explicitly about acknowledgment, but it also requires a sense of celebration of difference as well as a willingness to commit to betterment. Equity isn't about placing everyone on the same sized box. Rather, it's providing everyone a box sized uniquely to them so that everyone is standing at the same height at the end of the day. In a way, this research aims to challenge existing management within the agriculture industry by questioning the abide to heteronormative, white, male leadership to analyze how an industry creates room for those whom do not fit these existing spaces.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to seek understanding of perceived levels of diversity, inclusion, and equity within the agriculture industry from the perspective of gay male agriculturalists. Historically, the agriculture industry as a collective is often stereotyped to consist predominantly of, and to be conducive solely for, heterosexual, white, cisgender males and this body of research aims to discover if this is really the case, at least for the target population for this study. This body of research aims to take a step further to explore how a system that abides to heteronormative, male leadership creates space for those that are not or simply do not fit these labels.

Project Objectives

The analysis aimed to address the following:

1. How do gay men perceive their acceptance in the agriculture industry?

2. How does one's sexual orientation impact initial career decisions in the agriculture industry?
3. What is the perceived impact of sexual orientation on one's career and promotion opportunities?

Definition of Terms

Agriculturalist- An expert who routinely practices activities of or pertaining to agriculture.

Agribusiness: an industry engaged in the producing operations of a farm, the manufacture and distribution of farm equipment and supplies, and the processing, storage, and distribution of farm commodities. (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Blue Collar: of, relating to, or constituting the class of wage earners whose duties call for the wearing of work clothes or protective clothing. (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Diversity- The presence of difference.

Equity- Equal access to opportunity.

Inclusion- Sensation of feeling welcomed and general sense of belonging.

LGBT- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.

LGBTQ- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer.

LGBTQIA+- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexed, asexual. The +, 'plus' is an umbrella term encompassing individuals who do not identify with these labels, including but not limited to; pansexual, ally, questioning, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, and gender fluid.

White Collar: of, relating to, or constituting the class of salaried employees whose duties do not call for the wearing of work clothes or protective clothing. (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

Findings of this study are limited to only the experiences of these gay men interviewed.

This small group study does not represent the views or lived experiences of other members of the

LGBTQIA+ community that also work in the agriculture industry, nor necessarily the collective lived experiences of all gay men whom work within agriculture. Levels of perceived diversity, inclusion, and equity may differ across the agriculture industry dependent off of an individual's occupation, title, and geography.

Basic Assumptions

For this body of research, I am operating under the assumption that all interview participants are self-identifying gay males who work in agriculture and identify as agriculturalists. It is assumed that all participants have elementary level understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Additionally, I am proceeding this study assuming that all participants are expressing honest answers and feedback that represent them personally as professionals, not the views of any affiliated organizations.

Significance of the Problem

This study aimed to establish a repertoire of how gay men perceive the agriculture industry as currently, there is extremely limited academic understanding of this rapport. By understanding how gay men view current levels diversity, inclusion, and equity across agriculture, we may begin to better understand preexisting social problems within rural communities and might be able to identify key indicators impacting a person's retention at their job. New information related to diversity, inclusion, and equity can fill gaps between rural communities, jobs, mental health, and why people may choose to leave these communities and jobs. Through the interview process, this study aspires to better illustrate how sexual orientation can impact self-identity and overall career success.

Chapter Two: Literature and Theoretical Framework

This chapter focuses on laying the foundational concepts behind the reasoning for this study and connecting these reasons to the existing literature. This literature review will begin by examining societal pressure towards gay men and then illustrating how these historic issues are perpetuated and what this looks like as gay male professionals within the agriculture industry. For this study, it is imperative to understand that gay men have been negatively impacted for decades by hate fueled homophobia. This homophobia has sparked genesis for stereotypes that may impact career decisions and may impact talent retention within in organizations. According to Madon (1997), “knowing what people believe about gay males and how strongly they hold those beliefs provides insight into when stereotypes may be most likely to create biases.”

Stigma and Discrimination

Historically, LGBTQIA+ people have been the victims of bias, discrimination, and further harassment. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), homophobia, stigma, and discrimination can: affect income, whether an individual can get or keep a job, the ability to get and keep health insurance, and make it harder to be open about sexual orientation, which can increase stress, limit social support, and negatively affect health. (Stigma and Discrimination Affects Gay and Bisexual Men’s Health | CDC, n.d.). These negative externalities dramatically impact the health and well-being of gay men. Besides health, we must further examination towards the impact of sexual orientation with regards to workplace performance. Research conducted in 2019 did not find direct effects of sexual orientation on willingness to engage in work-related contact and hireability but has found both positive and

negative indirect effects of sexual orientation on hireability/contact. (Steffens, Niedlich, Beschorner, Köhler, 2019). This means that gay men are just as capable of performing work related tasks as their straight male colleagues, but their sexual orientation still impacts their job indirectly.

Two exhaustingly common stereotypes of gay men are that they're "feminine" and "flamboyant." A study found that people would perceive a gay leader who showed more stereotypical feminine characteristics to be less effective than a gay leader who showed more stereotypical masculine characteristics. (Pellegrini, Cristofaro, Giacomantonio, Salvati, 2020). What this means for gay men is that they have to work harder to prove and validate their leadership to those around them. Some industries and professions carry stereotypes so we must also examine those professionals who don't fit these molds. As an example; mechanics, firefighters, farmers, and plumbers are traditionally masculine jobs where nurses, hair stylists, and makeup artists are considered to be feminine jobs. Consider how one would react to a feminine female mechanic versus a masculine male mechanic. Now compare this reaction to a queer, gender non-conforming auto mechanic. These biases impact professionals and their businesses' and it's critical to separate the individual from preconceived notions.

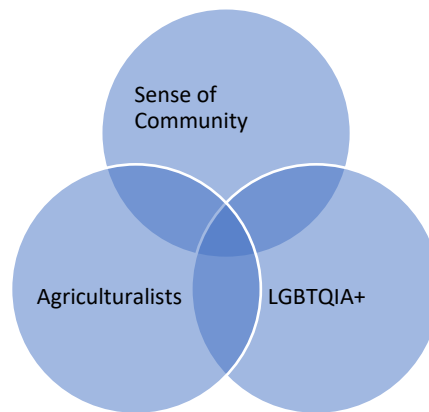
Social Identity Theory

Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s) and impacts our pride and self-esteem. (McLeod, 2019). A major element within Social Identity Theory is that the world can be divided into two categories: "us" and "them" or more formally known as in-groups and out-groups. The in-groups are the groups in which you are a member, where the out-groups are ones in which you are not and may even discriminate against due to this dichotomous nature. This two-bucket approach can be seen in urban vs rural, gay vs straight, city vs country, and farm vs off farm. This instantly places gay male agriculturalists in an

uncomfortable position because they're caught in a grey space where neither identity is enough to earn exclusive placing away from the other "them" bucket, leading to a denial of full acceptance from either group. Gay male agriculturalist might find themselves being too flamboyant or feminine to be accepted by straight men, too country to find acceptance by those in the city, and their rural job may deny them inclusion to urban communities.

The innate desire for inclusivity bares weight to organizational performance indicators. How people think as members of groups affects the outcomes of learning interventions. Therefore, social identity is a key input to or driver of learning and performance in organizations. (Korte, 2007). Work by Kramer (2006), aimed to conceptualize how individuals' psychological identification with a workgroup enhances their willingness to engage in behaviors that contribute to the creation of social capital within that workgroup. The social identities in organizations serve as important drivers of performance and as such, it should be encouraged to foster more inclusive, equitable cultural environments within organizations. Connecting social identities to self-identify leads to heightened performance and improved mental health, through increased self-esteem but is the leadership in agricultural organizations allowing gay men to connect and share both their social and self-identities authentically?

As gay men interact and collaborate within agricultural organizations; this study aims to solve if these members feel like they belong to the "us" or to the "them" group in their roles as both LGBTQIA+ people and agriculturalists and further define how these subsets of people perform and interact with one another. With fewer and fewer people working in the agriculture industry, and even fewer gay men proportionally compared to other members within the agriculture industry, there is a need to ensure hospitality and a sense of welcomeness for all to help foster environments that pull out the best performance from members within.



One can identify as an agriculturalist and yet not feel a sense of community working in the agriculture industry. Conversely, one can self-identify as gay and still not feel that they necessarily are welcomed by other members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The third intersection of identities is LGBTQIA+ people who also identify as agriculturalists, but these same people still may not feel welcomed in this space. A large piece of this could be comprised of numerically fewer gay people in geographically rural areas. Social Identity Theory suggests that an individual's peak performance resides at the intersection of community and self-identity and this study aims to analyze the intersection of all three by exploring the perceived inclusivity by gay agriculturalists.

Chapter Three: Methodology Section

Research Design

Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. (Smith, 2003). Phenomenology is particularly useful in trying to learn about something or a shared experience from the perspective of others. The purpose of a phenomenological approach in research is to clarify and

enlighten how people understand and comprehend certain phenomena. (Lester, 1999 as cited in UKEssays, 2018). Phenomenology was chosen to help guide this body of research as it pertains to the lived experiences of gay male agriculturalist and their perspectives of diversity, inclusion, and equity within the agriculture industry. These ten study participants all represent different facets of the industry, geographies, backgrounds, and values and by collecting their point of view, we can better understand their perception of the industry and how the industry nurtures or hinders the careers of gay men. As gay men are not the majority of the agriculture industry workforce, phenomenology permits the opportunity to uncover the lived experiences of this unique group.

Participants Selection

Participants for this study are all volunteering their time and engagement at their own free will. All ten participants in this study are openly gay, white, cisgender males who work within the agriculture industry and self-identify as agriculturalists. It is important to note that this study solely focuses on the lived experiences of cisgender, white males because intersectionality could pull in dimensions of racial discrimination. Intersectionality requires a critical lens to understand the realities of certain facets of identity. Participants for this research represent a variety of occupations, titles, experience, and organization from across the United States to better reflect the different types of career paths one may follow working within agriculture. It was important to have representation from both traditional blue- and white-collar jobs. Attention was also given to also include diversity of age amongst the study participants. Participants were identified through mixed sampling methods including stratified and snowballing; including personal contacts that were previously acquired through industry relations, as well as suggestions from other industry

individuals and fellow participants. All interview participants successfully met the stated criteria and completed the line of questioning.

Name	Ryan	Joe	Nick	Alex	Parker	Jim	Mike	Chris	John	Daniel
Job	Academia Blue Collar	Association White Collar	Academia Blue Collar	Academia Blue Collar	Veterinarian Blue Collar	Academia White Collar	Association White Collar	Agency White Collar	Association White Collar	Farm Blue Collar
State	IA	D.C.	NC	WI	SD	MS	CO	MO	DC	OR
Age	40's	40's	20's	20's	30's	30's	20's	20's	30's	30's

Instrumentation and Data Collection

For the collection of data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to better explore and understand the perceived levels of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to extract data in a conversational manner while allowing participants to express and explore ideas most important to them, even outside of the predetermined line of questioning. (Clifford et al., 2016). A set of interview questions were designed by the researcher and reviewed by a panel of experts to ensure that the formulated questions would best serve their purpose at collecting perspective. The panel of experts was comprised of two leadership faculty and a member of industry. It was important that interview questions were structured enough so that concrete data could be collected but the questions also had to be open-ended enough so that participants felt empowered to share their lived experiences with adequate detail. The interview questions were specifically formulated to tackle possible workplace issues, gauge sense of empowerment and authority within their role, understand possible challenges associated with their status of sexual orientation, and to detect the desire for longevity/retention. (See Appendix

A.) Interviews were intended to feel natural and conversational so that participants felt most comfortable though the interviewer restrained from interjecting personal opinion. Participants were asked to give verbal consent to their involvement but also to the recording of their interview. Interviews were recorded so that they could be replayed and reviewed to help write this report. (This research was approved by IRB at Virginia Tech #21-188 see Appendix B.)

Trustworthiness

Upon completion of the interview process, the researcher reviewed all audio transcriptions, checking for accuracy and credibility. The researcher self-identifies as a gay male agriculturalist and found all findings and points of discussion from study participants to be plausible. The researcher notes the differences between his own experiences and the experiences of the study participants. The researcher frequently conducted a system of checks and balances to recognize his own personal experience and bias while listening to these interviews. The researcher let the experience and perspective of study participants illuminate through the data while withholding his own experience and bias in the analysis. Collecting these experiences is to recognize the differences that gay men can experience in this discussion, reflecting on different perspectives developed across the agriculture industry. Future studies could follow this exact semi-structured interview to collect the perspectives of other groups in or outside of the agriculture industry. Direct quotes from participants are utilized in the findings section to ensure confirmability of presented findings. (Stenfors et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

All ten semi-structured interviews were recorded for audio and video to enable Zoom's automatic transcription feature. After that, each completed transcription was reviewed, corrected

if/when necessary, then coded and deeply analyzed for existing themes. The researcher utilized framing to code and analyze each interview. According to the American Psychological Association, framing is “the process of defining the context or issues surrounding a question, problem, or event in a way that serves to influence how the context or issues are perceived and evaluated.” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.). Further interviews were not needed as the research deemed the data reached saturation. Detailed quotes will illustrate confirmability throughout the next chapter of this report. All findings were reviewed by the researcher, whom is a member of the community of gay men working in the agricultural industry.

Timeline and Materials

This research project began in the fall of 2020 and spanned to the summer of 2021. This was done so that there would be sufficient time to design, conduct, and complete the necessary analysis required for this study. No tangible supplies nor materials were used for this study as all interviews were conducted virtually over a video meeting platform. Both initial and follow-up communication was all electronic utilizing instant messenger and email.

Chapter Four: Findings

Ten gay men from various sectors of the industry shared their agriculture story. The purpose of this study was to identify the perceived levels of diversity, equity, and inclusion from the perspective and lived experiences of gay men. This research examines the relationship between career and sexuality within the agriculture industry. This chapter aims to discuss the research findings while answering the previously identified three research questions.

The researcher identified the following themes and subthemes:

- **Exclusion**
 - Lack of Diversity and Inclusion
 - Lack of Accessibility
 - Hypermasculinity
 - Gaps in Family/Life Milestones

- **Navigating the Farm and the City**
 - Leaving the Farm/Rural Communities
 - Code Switching
 - White Privilege
 - Blue Collar vs White Collar

- **Feeding the Future Together**
 - Community
 - Youth Ag Programs
 - Stories Left Untold
 - True Grit
 - Opportunity

Exclusion

Majority of participants have experienced an element of exclusion as a component of their experience in working within the agriculture industry. Feelings of exclusion towards members of the industry can not only prevent talent attraction but also inhibits long-term talent retention. Participants reported hesitation while selecting paths for higher education, impacting their college experience but also ultimately impacting their initial career decisions. Study participants said that their identity as a gay man still impacts career decisions for the future.

Lack of Diversity and Inclusion

The industry's lack of diversity and inclusion can be felt through all facets that comprise the greater food system. "I think when you look at agriculture and the whole, we are not diverse when it comes to the gay and lesbian community. We're not even diverse when it comes to ethnicity, I mean it's still all very white male dominated, but I think there some signs of positive hope" (Joe). Acknowledging how homogeneous the industry currently is, is a first step in defining larger cultural transformation and in part, creating space for those who do not fit the box of straight, white, cis, and male. Brining your identity to your job is currently challenging and the existing environment does not signal inclusion for everyone.

Lack of Accessibility

One's identity not only carries mental weight when you're in the minority but within the agriculture industry, your identity can also impact your livelihood, your ability to conduct business, and your access to opportunity and assets. "You're going to meet people who are not going to accept you and you have to be ready for that and understand that and it's not going to

make it any easier. There's going to be people who don't want to do business with you. There's going to be people that don't want to show cattle with you or own anything with you or rent land to you or hire you. There's going to be all of those things and sure you're going to meet them all over the world but ag hasn't done anything to improve that" (Chris). As a farmer, land is the most important asset and lack of access to land and other necessary capital inputs could be devastating to one's livelihood. Many agribusinesses do not have tools available through Human Resources to mitigate these risks or seek reparation and participants reported having to deal with these challenges alone.

Hypermasculinity

Many participants reported a layer of protection as a cisgender masculine presenting male. "I'm maybe fortunate enough to be pretty straight passing you know. I know that some of us can't hide, but I can, I can blend. And so maybe that's why I'm able to be out here, because if I was not straight passing, I do not think I'd be allowed to do my job. My boss doesn't care, my coworkers don't really care, but I think my clients would" (Parker). Differentiating that gender presentation can also impact how you're treated as a gay man working in agriculture pulls in an element of intersectionality. In the eyes of clients, it's better to be gay and present traditionally masculine than to fit the societal stereotype of the flamboyant gay man and from the perspective of gay men, it's safer for your physical wellbeing and the health of your career.

Gaps in Family/Life Milestones

Participants noted that exclusion can also feel like subtly being reminded that you're different from your colleagues. Several participants commented on frequently being asked if they have a wife or how many kids they have. It's outside of just meeting new people but it's also

reshaping the narrative that you don't need to be married, or have kids, or need either as an excuse to do something as simple as taking time off from work. "Make it okay to ask for time off for things, I'm so tired of having to pussyfoot around and feel like I can't ask for time off because I don't have kids and I can't use my wife as an excuse. That should be allowed. I should feel comfortable enough to ask for time off or say, 'hey this is an important weekend for me' That should be a validation for me to take time off because I don't have a family" (Parker). If agribusinesses had adequate HR resources with proper training, employees wouldn't need to provide reasoning as to why they wish to use their own PTO. This coincides with the larger piece of cultural transformation because in a truly inclusive workspace, employees would feel comfortable, safe, and confident to say they we're taking time to see their husband or boyfriend which would be a direct shift away from the current heteronormative lens that the agriculture industry operates under.

Navigating the Farm and the City

Boots on the ground, traditional production agriculture-oriented roles are viewed as the least inclusive of agriculture jobs. All participants have a passion for agriculture, and most wanted to find a way to stay involved with agriculture and rural America without having to be directly on the farm due to concerns of safety, acceptance, and isolation. This theme tells the story of people leaving their home rural communities in search of fruitful careers and acceptance and the tools they developed along the way to protect themselves.

Leaving the Farm/Rural Communities

Majority of participants reported not feeling safe or welcomed on the farm or in their born rural communities. With a passion for agriculture, some left the farm to pursue higher education to qualify them for agriculture based jobs that could be found in the city. “The part of Illinois I’m from is very rural, very conservative and so through my time at college, I figured out I was gay and when I graduated, it was not a place I wanted to move to and frankly, it still isn’t so that had a huge impact” (Ryan). To some, the city represents more than just a job but also access to more inclusive spaces, more diverse communities, and environments that allow you to carry and display all of your identities with you.

Code Switching

Participants reported altering their presentation with their voice, posture, clothing, and dialects in different social and work environments in effort to blend in and avoid commentary on their sexual identity. “If I were meeting a group of people that I haven’t met before, my voice might change. My outfit might change a little bit. I might sit differently; I might laugh differently” (Chris). Participants recognize that exclusion still exists today against gay men in the agriculture industry. As such, gay men try to blend in for their physical and emotional wellbeing but also to ensure equal access to opportunity.

White Privilege

Participants discussed the unique struggles that their sexual identity imposes upon them as they navigate their career within the agriculture industry, but many also recognized the protection and privilege that their white skin provides them. “If I’m working in ag, I might dress

more masculine, if I'm going out for the evening, it might be more what you would consider feminine and if I'm talking to a group I might talk in a deeper voice but it's a little easier for me to because I'm also a white man. It's automatically slightly easier for me" (Chris). All participants in this study were white men to avoid possible intersectionality and racial discrimination but recognizing that one's whiteness still helps protect their visible queerness is important as we define equity across agriculture. If white gay cisgender men are dealing with inequality across the industry, we can only suggest what this implies for BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of color), queer, nonbinary people.

Blue Collar vs White Collar

Some participants chose to leave rural America, but others decided to stay on farmland. The dichotomy between white collar and blue-collar jobs was recognized by participants which encouraged some to pursue white collar jobs in the city. "I actually got outed by a disgruntled employee. Not my employee, a guy who worked in the same company, nothing to do with me, but he saw the success I was having with this side of the business and wanted a piece of it and wanted me out of there. And so, he told a bunch of our clients, that I was gay, and it actually ruined- I was going to see about fifteen people regularly, fifteen clients, big accounts, but it went from fifteen to three" (Parker). This participant's sexuality cost him business and he thought he would need to leave the area he resides so that he could escape the consequences of a coworker's hateful actions.

Feeding the Future Together

Participants shared signs of hope and optimism towards the future ahead so long as we all work together. Working together to feed the world requires us to create spaces where everyone

may share their identities openly. This theme encompasses finding a sense of belonging, amplifying minority voices, and identifying areas of improvement to help increase levels of diversity, equity, and inclusion across the agriculture industry.

Community

Participants shared how important it is to build a network of fellow LGBTQIA+ agriculturalists and allies. Surrounding oneself with our “us” group builds a sense of inclusivity and community, allowing us to live authentically while performing our best. “Choosing some more progressive circles in the agriculture industry has definitely helped me in terms of being more comfortable as a gay man in agriculture. Before coming out, I was scared, nervous of the reaction in some of my agricultural friends, just because agriculture happens in more rural spaces” (Alex). Many participants cited examples of Facebook groups and other social media platforms, enabling them to connect with gay agriculturalist across the country, mitigating the feeling of geographical isolation in rural areas.

Youth Ag Programs

During the interviews, participants were asked how they become involved in agriculture. Youth agriculture programs such as 4H and FFA played a huge role in the development of these agriculturalist. At a young age, people experienced an “us” group, allowing them to feel a part of something greater. “The agriculture field tends to be pretty conservative, but I think that there are outlets like 4H and FFA that can give young people sort of an avenue to feel comfortable and feel like themselves” (Jim). 4H and FFA programs could play a much larger role in bringing cultural change to the agriculture industry if they incorporated training elements and awareness

around DEI issues. At a young age, these programs could be shifting the mentalities of members and preparing the future generation of agriculturalists to work collaboratively with everyone in the sector.

Stories Left Untold

As we move towards and define a more equitable agriculture industry, it's critical that we tell the stories of minority voices who currently operate within the space. Currently, white cisgender gay males are the most visible but that shouldn't distract from the other minority agriculturalists. Organizations and corporations can play a larger role by making conscious efforts to highlight truly diverse farmers and producers. "You look at a lot of the marketing and a lot of the advertisement for a lot of the industries and you'll see the very traditional family represented in the imaging. I don't really see myself. I see the white male in me represented but certainly not the other aspects of me" (Ryan). By showcasing diversity in digital marketing and communications, corporations and non-profits can signal inclusion with very little lift. Inclusive marketing not only affirms the identities of those already employed but can also spark employment interest from potential recruits, helping attract the best talent to elevate agribusinesses.

True Grit

As a minority agriculturalist, several participants have felt the need to work twice as hard to prove themselves as equals to their straight counterparts. "I have to earn the respect of my colleagues and peers with my accomplishments more so than I think a straight person would. I have to work harder; I have to be better- that's my value. I think there's some intrinsic value that

people give people. You have an intrinsic value and an extrinsic value, and my intrinsic value is less than extrinsic value. So, if the sum of it has to be one to be successful, my intrinsic value to someone as a gay person is .25, so I need to have .75 accomplishments for extrinsic value to be a whole person” (Parker). There is so much energy exhausted by feeling like you have to prove something. The energy spent here cannot be regenerated elsewhere which means people are not cumulatively performing to the best of their ability. This has impacts to project efficacy, workplace efficiency, and likely could excel fatigue.

Opportunity

All participants we’re asked what the agriculture industry could do to make careers more appealing to gay men. Out of respect to their journey thus far, including all of their struggles, the researcher has chosen to leave these unfiltered and without interpretation. Feeding the future together demands we leave no stone unturned and no voice left unheard.

- “I think it’s visibility. Some of that imaging and branding shows that you know not everyone in agriculture is going to be that ‘traditional family’. I think those types of things can go a long way while being intentional about hiring and selecting for companies and for boards and commissions and these types of things to have the various forms of diversity represented” (Ryan).
- “I thought it was very monumental and I respect the organization but when the XXX voted down to include sexual orientation in their handbook as something they would not discriminate against, and then the XXX, which happened to be the time while I was working there, voted through unanimous consent to add sexual orientation to its preamble

of things that they would not discriminate against, and to be a member of the organization, I think that speaks volumes right there” (Joe).

- “I think the first step is just acknowledging the reality of it, so people know what they’re getting into but also that’s how you can start actually looking on how to fix things. I think one that that certain companies are doing is they have the ERG Employee Resource Groups for marginalized identities. I would love to see that more broadly done and more incorporated into the workplace culture because it’s not only an educational movement, it’s an affirmation and physically, psychological safe space for people. I would love to see that done more consistently across ag communities” (Nick).
- “It’s celebrating pride month and not just from a way of “yay, we support the gays” but doing more to give space for gay folks, to gather, to celebrate, to inform, and educate some of the others that might not understand what pride month means or why we celebrate pride month. I think representation is always huge and there are gay folks involved in agriculture and so just giving them the space and the platforms to educate and to inform those that might not be as involved. I think even just sharing stories because hearing stories really broadens perspective, we connect at a human level and so I think companies that have gay folks willing to share their stories, allowing them space to share those, would be a huge starting point in terms of making agriculture more accepting and attractive to more gay folks” (Alex).
- “Surrogacy benefits are huge and spousal benefits, like making sure it’s known that your same sex spouse can be on your insurance” (Parker).

- “I think the industry wants to be diverse and wants to be progressive in terms of scientific research and production and practice. But yet they still want this gritty exterior that they’re tough, they’re agriculture, and so I think that oftentimes the industry appears unwelcoming to lots of individuals and not just gay men, I mean we see under representation of people of color in the agriculture industry. It tends to be so traditional that it feels unwelcoming” (Jim).
- “In specifically thinking about for profit companies, promoting those people who are diverse, who are just as qualified as the next person to roles in leadership, I think it’s a great way to kind of attract some of those people and show that agriculture is changing, that agriculture can be a comfortable place for LGBTQ people and making sure that they have the resources they need. In terms of producer organizations, I think they have a little bit more of a role to play than they have been playing. I think that it comes down to really highlighting people in agriculture who are diverse and not necessarily focusing on the white, straight, cisgender man and celebrating some of those differences” (Mike).
- “I think business can take small steps starting with putting pronouns in email signatures; this is not an expensive lift. I think it’s something very small that says, “hey we accept you” and signals inclusion” (Chris).
- “Being out can be a political message, either intentionally or unintentionally, so you know around things like pride, or if there are big events, a lot of groups will be hesitant to speak out or say what they’re thinking because they don’t want to alienate a population that would view wishing people a happy pride as a political statement and turn off people. I think a lot of times, an absence of a message is not received as a neutral, it is just as bad

as not really saying anything. It's not sending the message that I think folks think it might in agriculture" (John).

- "I think there's an opportunity for co-ops to say, "we can give you a percentage more on your milk check to hire people from different backgrounds" or to give your employees an incentive to make the workplace more diverse" (Daniel).

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This qualitative study was designed to explore the perceived levels of diversity, equity, and inclusion from the perspective of gay male agriculturalists. This is not the first time that the industry has been challenged to be more inclusive. This can be seen clearly looking back towards women's equality, slavery, segregation and still seen in other parts today including immigrant workers. LGBTQIA+ equality is one of the many next steps of necessary progress for an industry whose mission is to sustainably feed and fuel a growing world. This final chapter will connect the previously discussed findings of the last chapter to answer the stated research questions through the lens of Social Identity Theory. Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s) and impacts our pride and self-esteem. (McLeod, 2019) and a major element within Social Identity Theory is that the world can be divided into two categories: "us" and "them" or more formally known as in-groups and out-groups. This chapter will offer recommendations for practice in how agriculturalists can better work together to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable food system. Lastly, this chapter concludes with recommendations for further research of this topic pertaining to the agriculture industry.

Research Question 1: How Do Gay Men Perceive Their Acceptance in the Agriculture Industry?

Theme 1: Exclusion

The majority of study participants described feeling excluded, unwelcomed, and judged at some point during their career thus far. These agriculturalists have felt placed outside of the “us” group of the majority, forcing them to feel like outsiders by default. These feelings have been sparked by colleagues, clients, and members of upper level leadership within their respective organizations. These feelings of exclusion result in a diminishment of workplace satisfaction as bringing one’s identity to work becomes increasingly difficult and in the long term this will impact organizational talent retention. One’s social identity is a key input to or driver of learning and performance in organizations (Korte, 2007) and these non-inclusive, limiting environments are holding back organizational excellence and future advancement for the agriculture industry.

Most gay men do not feel completely accepted by the agriculture industry. Though participants have not always felt wholly welcomed in rural or agricultural spaces, there is still a level of protection that white skin provides, enabling access to better treatment, assets, and opportunities in the industry. Participants shelter their identity in some circles in effort to avoid confrontation, uncomfortable lines of questioning, or career limiting retaliatory motives from colleagues.

Research Question 2: How Does One’s Sexual Orientation Impact Initial Career Decisions in the Agriculture Industry?

Theme 2: Navigating the Farm and the City

Majority of participants in this study engaged in a youth agricultural development program such as 4H and FFA. Not all participants grew up on a farm and yet they still found themselves pursuing careers in the agriculture industry. 4H and FFA was the first experience of belonging to an in-group or to a greater “us”. This experience at a young age of feeling welcomed and included was enough to fuel a fire of passion for agriculture. This experience guided them to pursue higher education in agriculture-based degrees which then ultimately spring boarded them towards their initial career decisions. Considering 4H and FFA programs consist of youth aged somewhere between middle and high school, most aren’t out, at terms, or maybe even aware of their sexual orientation at this time, so it makes sense why this was perceived as valuable experience. When entering college, as some begin to come out or prepare to come out as gay, experience initial feelings of fear as they start to question how those around them will accept their identity as a gay person.

The reputation of the agriculture industry precedes many people actually joining the workforce. The agriculture industry is not thought of as a diverse or inclusive place to work. Participants described initial feelings of hesitation, but their passion motivated them through their worries. Some participants returned to rural communities where others pursued agriculture jobs in the city with ambition of finding more diverse and inclusive communities, longing to feel as part of an ingroup again. Some participants reported code switching and through conscious and subconscious actions, try to mask their identity in effort to camouflage themselves in predominately heteronormative environments. This is not authenticity and the future food system deserves and is capable of better. As more players in the agriculture sector emerge into the sustainability space, these exclusionary feelings are a direct limitation to the industry’s social sustainability story.

Research Question 3: How Does the Identity of a Gay Man Impact Career?

Theme 3: Feeding the Future Together

Gay men in the agriculture industry continue to overcome obstacles because they are rooted to their work with a passion for feeding the world together. Customers of the food system are wildly diverse in the domestic market and so much of agriculture is exported to markets across the globe. The people who buy and consume the industry's product do not necessarily look like or find their values represented in the people who produce it. Many participants explained their early involvement with 4H and FFA, and there is potential for these organizations to broaden their impact by incorporating DEI education into their programming for members. By instilling these values and adding dimension to the perspective of members, we can bridge the gap between the "us" and the "them".

Study participants do not feel that their voice has been shared with those who need to hear it in managerial roles to help implement necessary change. Gay agriculturalists have had to work harder, learn faster, and mitigate their margin of error to simply prove themselves as equals in the industry. Agriculture often happens in rural areas and gay men have had to turn to social media to cultivate communities, foster friendships, and find their ingroups. Gay men have had to fight to defend their identities and their talent but continue to do so because they're committed to agriculture's tomorrow and we can all be a part of that.

Recommendations for Practice

Transformational change within the agriculture industry all begins with an honest conversation. Individuals must feel included not only at their place of employment but also within the greater umbrella of their industry. Feeling an intentional sense of empowerment is

crucial so that they perform their best. In some specific instances, in-depth training may be required within an organization to help ensure that all members of the organization have aligning views ensuring that the shared workplace is not only diverse but inclusive and equitable for everyone.

During the interview process, participants gave examples of both exclusionary practices and feelings of isolation directed towards their identity as gay men, relaying how these experiences impacted the formation of their social identity. In simplest terms, inclusion feels like your favorite pair of jeans- everywhere fits just right and it didn't require effort to button them. In many instances, inclusion can be little, easy changes that have big impacts. As an example, several participants noted feelings of inclusion and mutual respect when meeting a person for the first time and the individual chooses to use gender neutral language. Instead of defaulting to the heteronormative lens, "Do you have a girlfriend?" people can ask "Are you seeing anyone?" or "Are you partnered?" Much of the agriculture industry strongly relates to family relationships and often people will ask "Do you have any kids?" as a means of getting to know someone during initial introductions. For queer people, this question can be greatly alarming as family structure benchmarks can often look quite different from our hetero colleagues. For much of rural America, getting married and having kids at a young age is a normal part of the culture so this question isn't meant to offend, it's truly a way of extending connection. One way to disarm this question could be by including pets, "What kind of children do you have?" or "Do you have any kids or pets?" This now offers a pathway to keep the conversation going while widening the grounds of relatability and preventing feelings of exclusion. Recognizing that two men and their dog can have as much love in their home as a man, a woman, and their human child is an easy way to bring more seats to the table.

Expanding networks to those who are different from us is important to bringing new perspectives and talent to an organization. Organizations should feel challenged to look outside of their routine avenues when needing to bring a new staff member on board. Organizations should also make minority issues part of the regular dialect, utilizing official social media accounts to amplify messaging and to celebrate diverse talent where appropriate. Let this change happen from the top, down beginning with those at the very top of management. Lastly, make diversity, inclusion, and equity the thread of your organization's culture. Create safe spaces for difficult conversations, seek the input of those unlike you, uplift the voices of minority people, and through establishing adequate human resources, fabricate new instruments to assist in holding everyone accountable in pursuit of a more equitable industry. The agriculture industry has been challenged to change in the past, is challenged again to change today, and will be challenged to change again tomorrow; but this isn't unique from the rest of the world. Early adapters of change *may* experience indirect costs, but they *always* experience opportunity. Hypothetically, a grassroots organization could lose membership if they quickly embraced changes to improve inclusivity which then would impact funding and stakeholders. However, this same organization could its' increase political capitol, societal relevance, and qualify for unique grant funding incentives by adapting ahead of the curve.

Each participant was asked to provide one recommendation in how to make the industry more appealing to gay men.

1. Improving visibility
2. Voting for and supporting inclusive organizational policies
3. Develop protective and affirmative Employee Resource Guides

4. Broaden perspectives by openly celebrating pride month and creating safe spaces for story sharing across employees
5. Surrogacy benefits and same sex partner insurance benefits
6. Refining the industry exterior to make it more welcoming for everyone
7. Promoting diverse people in leadership roles and highlighting diverse people within the organization
8. Signal inclusion by adding pronouns to email signatures
9. Speak out and utilize organization social platforms to promote inclusive messaging and social causes
10. Incentivizing prices and diverse employees where appropriate

Recommendations for Future Research

This study explicitly focused on the lived experiences of white, gay, cisgender men and their perspectives of diversity, inclusion, and equity within the agriculture industry- this is under a hyper focused lens on a very minute portion of the population. As such, this body of work is not all encompassing of LGBTQIA+ people who also exists and operate within the agriculture industry. This is paramount to be mindful of when analyzing perceived levels of diversity, equity, and inclusion within this space of work. Agribusinesses drastically need established instruments through Human Resources to protect minority staff and build accountability. An HR safety net is an important piece of cultivating transformational change to how agribusinesses approach diversity, equity, and inclusion. Not all diversity is visible and a white, gay, masculine presenting, cis-gender man is likely treated differently than a black non-binary, queer person.

Both individuals could be working the same job in agriculture, possibly even within the same organization and have holistically different experiences.

The following recommendations for future research include; expanding the lens to include more members of the LGBTQIA+ community, not just gay cisgender men, examining how traditional gender conformation impacts individual treatment, and replicating the study to determine the impact of race on access to opportunity and assets in the agricultural industry, expanding the existing scope of this work. Ultimately, the goal would be to produce an intersectional version of this study that aims to understand the perceived diversity, inclusivity, and equity of agriculturalists while taking into account the dynamics of race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status as some of the guiding pillars during the process of identifying study participants. Intersectionality requires a critical lens to understand the realities pertaining to one facet of identity.

References

- Agriculture and its related industries provide 10.9 percent of U.S. employment. (2020). USDA ERS. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=58282>
- APA Dictionary of Psychology. (n.d.). American Psychology Association. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/framing>
- Barber, J. D. (2020). Perceived Inclusion Of Manrrs (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences) Alumni In Agricultural Organizations: The Relationship Between Inclusion, Psychological Needs, & Intrinsic Motivation (dissertation).
- Clifford, N. J., Cope, M., Gillespie, T. W., & French, S. (2016). *Key methods in geography*. SAGE.
- Cottrill, K., Denise Lopez, P. & Hoffman, C.C. (2014). How authentic leadership and inclusion benefit organizations. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 33(3), 275-292.
- GLAAD's 2019 Accelerating Acceptance Index: Results Show Further. (2019, June 24). GLAAD. <https://www.glaad.org/blog/glaad%E2%80%99s-2019-accelerating-acceptance-index-results-show-further-decline-lgbtq-acceptance-among>
- Korte, R.F. (2007), "A review of social identity theory with implications for training and development", *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 166-180. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090590710739250>
- Kramer, R.M. (2006), "Social capital and cooperative behavior in the workplace: a social identity perspective", Thye, S.R. and Lawler, E.J. (Ed.) *Advances in Group Processes (Advances in Group Processes, Vol. 23)*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 1-30. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0882-6145\(06\)23001-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0882-6145(06)23001-7)
- Madon, S. What do people believe about gay males? A study of stereotype content and strength. *Sex Roles* 37, 663–685 (1997). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02936334>
- McLeod, S. A. (2019, October 24). Social identity theory. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Agribusiness. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 6, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agribusiness>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Blue-collar. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 6, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blue-collar>

- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). White-collar. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved December 6, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white-collar>
- Movement Advancement Project. April 2019. Where We Call Home: LGBT People in Rural America. www.lgbt.org/rural-lgbt
- Murray, K. A., Trexler, C. J., & Cannon, C. E. B. (2020). Queering agricultural education research: Challenges and strategies for advancing inclusion. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 61(4), 296-316. <http://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2020.04296>
- Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>.
- Steffens, M. C., Niedlich, C., Beschoner, R., & Köhler, M. C. (2019). Do positive and negative stereotypes of gay and heterosexual men affect job-related impressions? *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 80(9-10), 548–564. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0963-z>
- Stenfors, T., Kajamaa, A., & Bennett, D. (2020, August 13). How to ... assess the quality of qualitative research. Wiley Online Library. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/tct.13242>.
- Stigma and Discrimination Affects Gay and Bisexual Men's Health | CDC. (n.d.). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/msmhealth/stigma-and-discrimination.htm>
- UKEssays. (November 2018). The Purpose of Phenomenology. Retrieved from <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/psychology/purpose-of-phenomenology.php?vref=1>
- Valerio Pellegrini, Valeria De Cristofaro, Mauro Giacomantonio, Marco Salvati, Why are gay leaders perceived as ineffective? The role of the type of organization, sexual prejudice and gender stereotypes, *Personality and Individual Differences*, Volume 157, 2020, 109817, ISSN 0191-8869, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.109817>.

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience coming out as gay in the workplace.
 - Why did you choose to come out?
2. Tell me about your view of diversity within the agriculture industry.
 - How do you believe this compares to other industries?
3. Did you have any hesitation or self-conflict with entering the agriculture work force, why or why not?
4. How has your identity as a gay man impacted the way you navigate your career or alter your career decisions?
 - Have you ever felt contradiction or conflict between your identities, primarily focusing on your identities as a gay man and as an agriculturalist?
5. Do you feel that the agriculture industry as a collective is inclusive? Tell me about your view of inclusion within the agriculture industry.
 - How do you believe inclusion in the agriculture industry compares to other industries?
6. How do you feel the gay community is represented in the agriculture industry and/or in your workplace?
7. If an uncomfortable or offensive situation arose with regards to your identity as a gay man, would you feel comfortable and safe to ask for support from your supervisor and/or the Human Resources Department and if not, why?
8. Do you feel there are opportunities to be promoted as a leader in your workplace/the agriculture industry?
 - What do these opportunities look like?
9. Have you ever felt a sense of judgement in the workplace from colleagues, and or clients, for being openly gay?
10. What actions should agricultural businesses take to make working in the industry more attractive to gay men?
11. What advice would you share with closeted gay men in agriculture?
12. Do you have any questions for me?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience as a gay man in the agriculture industry?

Appendix B**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: April 26, 2021
TO: Curtis R Friedel, Michael Christopher Granche
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Perceived Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Across the US
Agriculture Industry: From the Lived Experiences of Gay Men
IRB NUMBER: 21-188

Effective April 26, 2021, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **April 26, 2021**

Appendix C

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Curtis Friedel

IRB# and Title of Study: #21-188 Perceived Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Across the US Agriculture Industry: From the Lived Experiences of Gay Men

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

My name is Michael Granché and I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech. I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an interview with me. As part of the study, you will be asked a series of questions about your experience as a gay male agriculturalist. This study aims to explore the perceived levels of diversity, inclusion, and equity within the agriculture industry from the perspective of gay male agriculturalists. This body of research aims to take a step to explore how a system that abides to heteronormative, male leadership creates space for those that do not fit these labels. Interviews will be conducted one-on-one and recorded for transcription and coding for future analysis to ensure that I can be present in this conversation with you.

The study should take approximately 30-60 minutes of your time. We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

Any data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. Your interview will be recorded on Zoom, including both your audio and video. The researchers will code the transcripts using a pseudonym (false name). The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher's office. The researchers will maintain a list that includes a key to the code. The master key and the recordings will be stored until successful completion of this project and after the study has been completed will all be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Michael Granché at mcg1996@vt.edu or by phone (540) 326-2742. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at 540-231-3732 (irb@vt.edu).