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Agriculture and Tampa Bay news: How do local news media frame agribusiness?

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Agriculture and Tampa Bay News: How Do Local News Media Frame Agribusiness?

by

Alex R. Ritzheimer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Anthropology
College of Arts and Sciences
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to hardworking farmers and the journalists who will tell about them.

Acknowledgements

First I must thank my wife, Laura, who never once told me I could not finish this thesis in light of the impossible schedules we both keep. Without her, I may have never overcome my technological challenges and resistance to evolve. Likewise, I will always consider Jemy Hinton, her hospitality, and her guidance in my internship to be some of the most endearing experiences of my life. I wish to fondly acknowledge the support of those who teach and have taught me in the field of anthropology. Dr. Terry Prewitt from the University of West Florida has been and always will be my source of encouragement, understanding, and most importantly friendship in my anthropological endeavors. At the University of South Florida, the Department of Anthropology deserves my deepest regards for the support, encouragement, impartment of knowledge, and the most enriching and enjoyable classroom and field experiences I have ever had. I thank Dr. Lorena Madrigal for her faith in me in the beginning and supporting my acceptance into the graduate program. Finally, I extend my appreciation, greater than she will ever know, to Dr. S. Elizabeth Bird for recognizing my need for academic validation, and extending great wisdom that allowed me to assemble all of the pieces of my academic and extracurricular experiences into this thesis.

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Alex R. Ritzheimer

ABSTRACT

The purpose for this thesis was to explore a dynamic between the news media, their subjects, and their audience. I investigate whether everyday news media frame the information they deliver in such a way as to potentially direct the audience on how to respond to news stories. The setting for this research question is in the Tampa Bay area of Florida and the subject matter deals specifically with agriculture, its practitioners, how they do business, and how the local news media report about it. The issue will be explored from an applied anthropological perspective, basing conclusions on field research and an internship with the Department of Environmental Protection and their agricultural liaison. Several newspaper articles and television news broadcasts were monitored over several years and selected on a basis of their relevancy to the topic. The anthropological value of this study is in discovering how media disseminate this particular subject matter and how a deficiency in information flow could result. I explore a body of literature that is both diverse and germane to the field of media studies to gain a broad perspective on how different news events are mediated. Following the analysis, a qualitative assessment is given to further the understanding of how local news media frame reports related to the practice of agriculture.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“While the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about” (Bernard Cohen, 1963)

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the news media disseminate news related to agriculture and agribusiness in the Tampa Bay region of Florida. Essentially, I want to find out what the “script” is that the news media write for audiences and how that might affect people’s understanding, opinions and actions related to these issues. My purpose is not to indict popular news media for scripting their news stories; the fact that they do appears to be common knowledge among most informed media consumers and media scholars. However, I believe that whatever the form of news media (e.g. television, internet, or print), the creators of the news stories have some intention or motivation for scripting or framing those stories the way they do. These intentions may eventually produce consequences that may not be clearly apparent until long after specific stories are told.

One of the reasons for the particular framing of agricultural issues by news media may be the training of journalists, who often lack expertise in more specialized areas. “Whereas journalists had been trained in how to write, they were ill equipped to fully understand their influence in the complex relationship between producers and consumers (Whitaker, Dyer 2000: 125).” Thomas F. Pawlick (2001) describes a 1994 study in his

book surveying members of the American Agricultural Editors' Association and the National Association of Agricultural Journalists about the quality of agricultural reporting in the daily press. Pawlick concluded that "both groups of judges said general-interest reporters' agricultural coverage is superficial, event-oriented, and often too cute or folksy (2001: 3)."

Such findings suggest there is good reason to use an interdisciplinary approach to explore the relationship between the media, a subject they report on, and the news consumers. Most specifically, I chose to look qualitatively at the lack of informative reporting with regard to the public at large and their food sources.

The Research Question

Are the media framing the news about agricultural and agribusiness issues in Tampa Bay in such a way to cause understanding of these issues to be inadequate? Everyone who tunes into their local news channel or reads a local newspaper is subject not only to the information that is broadcast to them, but also to the way the players for that news source choose to frame that information. Whitaker and Dyer (2000) performed a quantitative study of bias in agricultural reporting addressing specific themes such as food safety, sources cited, and so on for agricultural news articles. The results of this study are discussed in Chapter 4, relating their findings to my more qualitative observations.

My own observations from watching television news systematically, for example, suggest that quite subtle elements may affect the way a story is presented. For instance, voice inflexions by the news anchor can create a positive, neutral, or even negative frame

for the viewer as the anchor places vocal emphasis on different points that direct the viewer to what are considered to be the most important elements of the story. Similarly, headlines may be used to frame what is regarded to be the key point before the reader even starts the story. I will address such phenomenon in my research findings through analysis of text in printed news articles, as well as broadcasted news stories that show this tendency.

Furthermore, the positioning of the article within the publication may shroud a core issue. Whitaker and Dyer, for example, found that articles pertaining to agriculture were often obscured by placing them in sections of the newspaper that did not appear to be relevant to the subject matter (p. 125).

Thus my study was designed to analyze local news broadcast content and the text in newspaper articles in the context of farm-related news stories, from a qualitative standpoint, to determine whether audiences may be receiving news that is framed to cover the issues in particular directions that could potentially lead to misinformation.

In the course of graduate study, I discovered that the farming industry and its participants had an important story to tell, but the main conduit for that story, the popular news media, may not be telling the story. Therefore, an anthropological view of this discrepancy should contribute to not only anthropology, but also to the interdisciplinary field of journalism studies.

Choices available to news consumers

There are hundreds of news sources available to every consumer especially with the phenomenal growth of the internet over the last couple of decades. The inherent

problem with that is that with more choices comes more effort necessary to weed through the information in order to reach an informed and accurate view of any issue. This is no different than becoming an informed automobile consumer. However, what percentage of automobile or news consumers actually invest the time and research necessary to gain a solid understanding of what they consume? This point captures the reasoning behind my choice to analyze popular media. I believe that sources of information that are the most readily available to most people will be most influential.

Are there agriculture-specific news sources available to the public? While all news media do cover agricultural subject matter on occasion, it seems as though farming news is shrinking like the farmlands about which they report. Thomas F. Pawlick (2001) points out, “Whether in North America, the former Soviet Union, or Africa, the media resources devoted to coverage of agriculture and rural affairs are dwindling or inadequate (2001: 5).”

This would suggest that reporting on agricultural economics and sociocultural issues, for example, is not reaching the audience to which it is most important, the actual end consumer of all agricultural efforts. Simply put, if you eat, you may wish to be informed of at least the baseline issues affecting your local food growers and producers. I intend to discover whether or not the popular news media in the Tampa area appear to be covering these issues adequately.

The research design will be outlined in chapter 3, but generally I monitored the four major television network affiliates in Tampa Bay, NBC’s channel 8 news, CBS’s channel 10 news, Fox Network’s channel 13 news, and ABC’s channel 28 news. I also researched for farming-related articles in the two popular newspapers, the *Tampa Tribune*

and the *St. Petersburg Times*. These represent the major sources of popular news for the Tampa Bay region. For comparison, I reviewed articles from a local, specialized periodical that came into circulation during the time of my research known as *In The Field*, a monthly magazine-styled publication by Berry Publications, Inc. in Plant City, Florida that is for and about Hillsborough County's agricultural community. *In The Field* is not readily available unless one drives to Plant City and finds it at certain businesses. The publisher only mails it to "...a target market, which includes all of the Greenbelt Property owners, members of the Hillsborough County Farm Bureau, and Strawberry Grower's Association (*In The Field*, Feb. 2005, p.5)." Therefore, the largest urban concentrations of the population in Tampa Bay are probably not getting the benefit of this publication's content. One other source of agricultural news is *Florida Agriculture*. This is the journal of the Florida Farm Bureau, printed quarterly and distributed only to paying members of the local county bureaus. This is a very comprehensive yet concise periodical for Florida's growers and producers to keep them informed of legislative effects on farming; however, it is also only available to a small sample of the state's population and certainly a negligible number of lay people.

The face of agriculture and agribusiness in Tampa Bay

The setting for my internship and research provided one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. A fellow graduate student, Lori Collins, suggested I look into an internship with the Department of Environmental Regulation where she had been employed in the past. From there, I met with Jemi Hinton, the agricultural liaison for the DEP in Hillsborough County, the largest farming county in the Tampa area. I

accompanied her on her weekly farm visits where her job was to check in with agribusiness owners and find out whether they were successfully navigating through the vast amount of regulatory red tape dictated by her agency as well as a large list of other regulatory agencies. She then would encourage me to interview the farm owners and ask questions that would help me with my research.

Jemi further encouraged me attend meetings of the Hillsborough County Agricultural Economic Development Council (AEDC) who directly advise the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners on all matters relating to farming operations and how they affect and are affected by political decision making. They ultimately function to provide the board with an ongoing clear and holistic view of how agriculture contributes to the overall economy of the county and how that can be preserved and developed in the face of regulatory hindrances. This setting is where I gained regulatory knowledge and experience as a participant-observer described in Chapter 4.

My experiences were both broad and intensified by working with Jemi as she introduced me into the offices of some of the largest agricultural operations where I could perform some informal interviews with business owners. I would have otherwise spent months and perhaps even years trying to get appointments to speak with some of these individuals as they are heavily consumed with regulatory functions in their businesses these days. Therefore, the opportunity afforded by this arrangement has ever since proven to be invaluable to my growing understanding of the farming industry.

During this internship, I learned that Hillsborough County in Florida, which includes Tampa as the largest metro area, is the 59th largest (out of 3076) agricultural

product—producing county in the United States (Hillsborough County Economic Development, 2008). Not once during my research of local news sources did I find mention of any facts regarding the size or economic impact of agribusinesses in Tampa Bay.

The face of agriculture in Tampa Bay is certainly not unvarying. The demography and culture of this industry is made up of a collection of farm owners, hard working men and women who have adapted, sometimes on a daily basis, to the volumes of regulations, industry fluctuations, disproportionate food safety alarms sounded by news media, competition from foreign trade, family challenges, environmental changes, and just about anything else the world may throw at them to challenge the everyday process of growing and harvesting to feed their neighbors. The interviews I will describe later will hopefully reinforce this picture in detail.

Foodways and information pathways

What legitimizes a media—audience study as real anthropology? Anthropology has produced many studies on how people eat, what they eat, how they obtain food, basically the culture of foodways and how they are intimately woven within the fabric of our existence. The phenomenon of human subsistence is as interesting today as it ever has been as people's strategies continue to evolve. Another dynamic that intimately exists alongside subsistence is the political decision-making with regard to all the parameters of food production, safety, and consumption. In today's highly mediated world, the news media can have profound effects on how that dynamic is understood by the public, thus having the power to introduce change into the postmodern culture of

food. “As an essential yet also mundane everyday activity, eating in all cultures is expressive of both belief-systems and social distinctions that exist within them. While this has been recognized in social science - and, particularly, anthropology - many questions concerning the meanings of foodways within the overall patterns of "post-modern" culture have yet to be tackled (Crouch and Oneill, 2000: 181).”

Simply stated, I believe that the analysis of mainstream media dissemination of information about everyday issues around subsistence choices is definitely real anthropology. Bird (2003) states, “we need to consider all our qualitative methodologies as different types of ethnographic encounter that will necessarily produce different kinds of discourse depending on the context (2003:10).” Utilizing her perspective as support for this paradigm of qualitative research, the results from my ethnographic findings and textual analysis will prove generally valuable as applied anthropological inquiry.

Media's attention to farming issues

Proper attention to farming issues may be defined as coverage relevant to the nuances of agribusiness, the culture of family farming, and how they relate to the end consumer and the voting public at large. The family farm has been credited as being the very cornerstone and “key engine of growth in the opening and development of North America by Europeans, and stamped its character on the democracies of the United States and Canada (Pawlick, 2001: 14).” This statement underscores the political importance of a healthy and informed public opinion of agriculture and indeed grants a massive responsibility to the composers of the information stream. In essence, how the news media handles agricultural journalism could have profound effects upon the very future

of democracy in some nations. The reason I believe this is that for every family farm lost, a corporate farm may often take over that space, and no other influence on policy seems to be greater than large corporations and the power of their lobby.

So, what may news media do to give agribusiness its due? They may start by not sensationalizing news topics. On a personal level, journalists have the freedom to research, interview, and present the story in as complete a form as they can, guided by professional ethics. Editors, of course, are also concerned with how well they are marketing to the consumer, protecting the advertisers' interests, and not being sued for libel. Professional news values tend to favor the dramatic and sensational, rather than the mundane, leading to news coverage that may help to create "moral panics" over particular social issues, a point that can be directly relevant to coverage of food-related topics. For example, Bird's case study about an urban legend related to AIDS infection that became journalistic "truth" is an extreme yet very real example of how the public can be led to see issues in an inaccurate and sensationalized way (Bird, 2003).

Academia's attention to agricultural journalism

As Pawlick (2001) points out, "Worldwide, most reporters and editors are urban-bred, urban-based, and urban-oriented, generations removed from farm life." He continues, "Lack of any personal experience with agriculture, or of the opportunity to learn about it in school, renders the countryside a literal *terra incognita* to many media people –out of sight and out of mind (2001:7)." I would elaborate that as close as some subdivided housing developments are to large scale family farms, the food production

values and richness of culture that exists there are completely obscured by perimeter walls where only the odors of farming are recognized.

Therefore, there may well be a deficiency within the training structure of journalism students that should be addressed. Later in chapter 4, I will suggest some changes that I believe are important to make the mass communication curriculum more holistic and better qualified to outfit a journalism student for agricultural reporting.

My background and inspiration for the research

My early intentions were to follow a needs assessment path. More specifically, I thought that the participatory—action model would be the most valuable in the context of this research. I believed the agribusiness community needed empowerment in the area of their public image and how it was perceived by the consumers. Inspired by Greenbaum's (2002) studies of the Hope VI housing development projects in Tampa, this seemed to be a valuable and relevant approach to research. However, I came to believe that a qualitative ethnography and textual analysis would be a necessary step toward advocacy if my research would show that the farming community even had a need in this area. As time has proven, however, that desire for advocacy has taken a natural course in that I was recently asked to serve as director for the Young Farmer and Rancher Committee for the Pasco County Farm Bureau, and I believe this research will directly inform my activities in that capacity.

I believe that the inspiration for the research described here was simply born out of my living environment combined with many applied anthropology classes. My wife Laura and I moved to a rural agricultural town during my second semester of graduate

classes in applied anthropology. The town is Dade City, a county seat in Pasco County, Florida. Dade City has deep roots in beef and citrus commodities and a multi-generational residence base. This community, as well as scores of other rural towns in the U.S., is right in the middle (both culturally and geographically) of the urban sprawl phenomenon.

The first and obvious question for me was whether or not there could be a disenfranchised subculture within this agricultural community that was being victimized by unplanned growth and the insidious development dollar. I believed that was a reality; however, I needed to reign in my research scope immediately because urban sprawl phenomena, while certainly worthy of any and all research efforts, were too large and complex for a master's thesis. So, if the agriculturalists in my town and surrounding areas had a need, what was it? Realistically, I could not produce an ethnography that would influence state and federal congressional members to cut agricultural regulation red tape that directly results from encroaching suburbs and causes bottle necks in farm productivity. I could, however, combine my ethnographic experiences with an analysis of how farming was being portrayed to the public by their local news sources and observe how media framing plays out in this specific subject area and locality.

The folks under those new rooftops, that were being planted faster than any orange grove ever was, must have known they were sharing space with farmers because the local news media was reporting about agriculture. But were farmers being seen by the public through a filter that may be affecting the clarity, the entirety, or the accuracy of the vision?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“So what is an anthropological perspective on news and journalism? Briefly put, it is a way to explore the nature of news as a form of cultural meaning making-its creation, content, and dissemination.” (S.Elizabeth Bird, 2009)

Fair shake

Farming matters seem to bore most urbanites and suburbanites until the fair rolls into town with those wonderful greasy corndogs. For a brief few days, consumers get a closer view of where their breakfast, lunch, and dinner come from while they splurge on junk food snacks and spend too much money on stuffed animal toys. The irony in that cultural activity we call the festival or fair, whereby farmers’ animals, grown commodities, and equipment samples come together with the public that otherwise does not seem to care about agriculture, continually intrigues me. The first state fair was in Michigan. The following is an excerpt from a website giving information about the fair:

The Michigan Fair has the distinction of being the first State Fair in America, starting a tradition of providing a showcase for the agricultural products and accomplishments of farmers in the region. The first Michigan State Fair was held in 1849. The location of the fair changed frequently, but in 1958, the fair was dedicated as State Historic Site #172, which is the permanent home of the event. Generations of farmers have been inspired to do a better job and to use improved methods in farming. The fair provides a chance for farmers to learn about new methods and to compare notes about the best technology. Fair participants motivate each other to be even better at what they do (Nyholm, 2008).

The fact that Michigan’s fair system still places so much emphasis on their agricultural roots is encouraging; however, Florida’s state fair system cannot boast the

same. From my own observations and the opinions of those I have spent time with at the AEDC meetings, Florida's State Fair, held every winter in Tampa, has consistently placed less emphasis on farmers and their products.

I am only mentioning this change in fair climate to emphasize just how alarmingly low the public opinion of farms, farmers, and farming may become in Tampa Bay if the media are not mindful of how they portray farm-related news. I have personally observed exhibit spaces, previously dedicated to agricultural commodities and farm equipment, slowly but continuously being transformed into vendor space or agriculturally irrelevant displays. Perhaps fair attendees have been let down by their news sources in not informing them of how important awareness is of these elements upon which the fair concept was built. Maybe if they were better informed, they would demand less midway space for rides and more display area for farms.

For the purposes of this study, I decided to look at varying concepts of how mediated issues and events are conceived of by anthropology and other media-oriented scholarly endeavors and the various study paradigms that a select group of scholars have embarked upon to describe news media as culturally significant.

Media production

As with any subject matter, why should anthropology study news media? This question must be answered in terms of what stratifications exist within the phenomenon of mediated culture and what the definition of media actually is. So to define specifically what *media production* is, I chose the following description:

Like consumption, media production is fundamentally a social and cultural act, involving not only the creation of media texts, but also the generation of identities, interpretations, subjectivities, statuses, and meanings among the persons engaged in media production (Peterson, 2003: 161).

Herein describes the very essence of understanding media culture as perceived through intense ethnography of mass media. This is truly what applied anthropology was “born” to do. Deconstructing mediated cultural phenomena is only the canvas upon which the painting of truth is to be portrayed, however. From there, we must know what these messages have the power to do, what they can actually change inside a culture. There are many conceptions of how media interact with people within the context of their everyday lives, so I chose the following scholars and their studies for their relevancy to my topic of how local news is reporting on agribusiness in Tampa Bay.

The discipline of applied anthropology is well equipped, now more than ever, to fully understand the dynamics of mass media, the fabric of information that is woven throughout all of the textual constructs, and therefore be able to interpret why the interaction of all of the cultural variables contained therein matter to the human race.

Media ethnography and expressive culture

Peterson’s definition of media production is so comprehensive, that one can visualize a newsroom and all of its shades of sociopolitical agendas, painstaking motivations for advancement, and the adopting and discarding of self images as if they were chewing gum. I reviewed several concepts in Peterson’s (2003) book, *Anthropology and Mass Media: Media and Myth in the New Millennium* and found them

to be essential to studying the cultural effects of news mediation. Primarily, I felt his departure from the traditional discussion of interdisciplinary studies when referring to anthropology and mass communication studies was very intriguing. He chooses to approach these studies not as a combining of disciplinary paradigms but with a “cross-fertilization” model (2003:16) where results are more productive and less skewed by overlapping or clashing methodologies. He states, “Academic disciplines are cultural systems with different sets of values and different practices. They have different methods and theoretical assumptions that lead them to pay attention to different things, or to understand (and value) the same things in different ways (2003:16—17).” Therefore, as Peterson sees it, when members from varied disciplines all take on separate aspects of a research project, specific to their talents, they are not necessarily benefitting from the perspectives of the other researchers. He feels the more productive approach is to retheorize “through interdisciplinary reading, discussion and collaboration (2003: 17).” So for my purposes of reaching further into the framing phenomenon of local news and how it affects its nearby food producers, ongoing dialogue between mass communication scholars, agricultural scientists, political scientists, marketing research experts, and applied anthropologists would effectively produce solid data that may change the way farm news is handled by popular media.

Another concept that Peterson addresses is one that views media as a member of the field of expressive culture. Here he refers to William O. Beeman’s (1982) use of the term to mean “institutions and practices through which people enact, display, and manipulate symbolic materials ‘with the implicit [or explicit] expectation that other individuals will be directly affected by such presentations’ (2003: 18).” If so, then my

use of the term ‘scripts’ in the introduction of this thesis may be applicable to understanding the basis for popular news and their mediation of events. The raw materials that journalists gather from their sources may be seen as simply concepts for the narrative that follows. If expressive culture also includes “drama, art, play myth and ritual” as Peterson points out (2003:19), then this could accurately describe how a news story is actually born and further framed to produce an intended result. One could look at this view as empowering media with the ability to entertain the audience while allegedly informing them or perhaps you could take the view that media is simply a source of entertainment first and an information source secondly. Audience studies, however, have surely proven that popular news media are considered to be the primary source of truth for the general public, thus putting them at the top of the power structure in the elements of expressive culture.

Ontologically, I believe that power exists to set public agendas within the structure of media’s expressiveness and it has fueled my entire motivation for this study. Epistemologically, I feel that much more analysis should be done, both ethnographical and quantitative in nature, on what specific effects take place politically and socially as the result of framing agribusiness news. Only then will we have the knowledge of just how that expressive power plays out. I feel that Peterson’s book would be an excellent text for a class on media ethnography and an essential tool for an ethnographer actively engaged in media consumption studies.

Elizabeth Bird’s (2003) book, *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World* was the basic text and inspiration for this thesis. She teaches that media are indeed an integral element in culture and that their messages are tightly woven into the fabric of

everyday human life. Her discussions of how members of the audience incorporate those messages, ranging from her media deprivation exercise to prove a dependency on media input (2003: 1—3) to her case study about how news media’s power to transform an urban legend (unconfirmed story in a magazine) into a perceived-as-factual cultural narrative entering “public consciousness” (2003:147), leads me to ponder whether academic training may even be sufficient to provide an immunity against the agenda-setting function of the news media.

Bird (2003) further describes a research design where subjects of a focus group, American Indian and non-Indian, are asked to create a fictional television series that they would view on a regular basis, one condition being that one character had to be a Native American. In the course of character creation, the non-Indian participants based their design of the Indian characters on stereotypes they had learned about from past mediated visions of Indians and Indian lifeways (Pp. 86—117). I believe this example is a clear display of media’s power of imagery and how ingrained images may become in people’s minds just by portraying those images in some mediated fashion. Reading about this study inspired me to coin the phrase, “green acres mentality” to refer to how media portray farmers and farm life. Ironically, the television series from the sixties where I use the term from was about a city lawyer and his socially-imbedded wife who move to a rural community to live his dream of becoming a farmer. Of course, he was a “gentleman farmer” and not a “sharecropper” that was “dirt poor” or uneducated like some of the other characters on the show. Perhaps those images of farm life, as portrayed by the writers of that sitcom, have endured in the minds of viewers from that time. I hypothesize that if Bird’s study was replicated, changing only the constituent character

from an American Indian to an American farmer, the same types of stereotypical descriptions would pervade the writers' visions for that character's profile, echoing the comedy series just described.

Through Bird's (2003) ethnographical experiences, she teaches that media are woven tightly through the lifestyles of most ordinary people. From a cultural perspective, she writes, "media bring entertainment, diversion, food for thought, and shared symbols that unite people, whether they are connecting interpersonally or electronically (2003:165)." I am most interested in the "food for thought" aspect of her description as it is most germane to my topic here; however, every function of media she lists proves that media as a cultural construct is perhaps bigger than life itself. Without these opportunities for narrating life, what meaning would only biological existence provide for us? Therefore, we must grasp the full meaning of how it interacts with every member of society if we are indeed interested in knowing which direction our society is heading. For thinking people, I believe all forms of media, especially news, are a reflective tool for which to ponder the progressions and regressions of our species. Whether sensationalized, purely objective, or concentrated lies, every headline that speaks to us has the power to dash all hopes of our advancement or provide glee in seeing another human get it right for a change. Bird (2003) poses the question whether media provide the necessary symbols for which to live by, or whether they are "insidious tools of economic, cultural, and political oppression" or both (2003:167). I believe media are all of that and much more as we continue to discover what these narratives mean in the context of global culture.

Agenda-setting, framing, and news as narrative

“The press does more than bring [political] issues to a level of political awareness among the public. The idea of agenda-setting asserts that the priorities of the press to some degree become the priorities of the public (McCombs and Shaw, 1977:6).”

Another reason to study media influences is to comprehend complex theories such as the agenda-setting ‘function’ of the press and how far that power reaches. McCombs calls the agenda-setting “perspective” a “model of limited media effects (Bryant and Zillman, 1994:7).” He further instructs that “...issues can be arrayed along a continuum ranging from obtrusive to unobtrusive. As the term implies, some issues literally obtrude in our daily lives (1994:7).” In other words, the existence of some social phenomenon may become knowledge for some people because of its overarching impact to the society it occurs in and no mediation of the event would necessarily had to have occurred.

Therefore, the ability to set an agenda, as far as media are concerned, would not be exclusive to journalists. Currently, an example of how media effects are limited would be the housing foreclosure wave that has reached across the entire United States, an issue McCombs would describe as “obtrusive”. Many people would not even have to own a television to feel the effects of the economic decline resulting from the “obtruding” housing crisis. Those being displaced from their homes in the midst of their realization of this phenomenon would not need any form of media to help them grasp that reality.

The agenda-setting model can be clearly seen in the current pervasiveness of national healthcare topics across the media. The last time I remember anyone speaking passionately about the status quo of our nation’s healthcare system was when first lady Hillary Clinton had chosen to take on legislating change in the same areas President

Obama is attempting to today. As a consumer, I might ask whether the agenda is being set by the needs of the people, the needs of the powerful juggernaut known as the insurance lobby, the insurance investment portfolios of the decision-makers themselves, or by the news media and their quest for political fodder. Perhaps all of the above scenarios contribute.

Saliency is the core characteristic of a headlines and story lines and therefore needs to be considered by media consumers and scholars alike. McCombs (1994) describes how saliency may be controlled by the news according to time and space constraints and that this is “the first step in the gatekeeping routine.” He adds, “ but the items that pass through the gate do not receive equal treatment when presented to the audience...newspapers, for example, clearly state the journalistic salience of an item through its page placement, headline, and length (1994: 4).” So in essence what McCombs is eluding to is that saliency can be manipulated in ways to change the meaning of story by framing it for optimal news worthiness or a variety of other motives.

McCombs (1977) also describes the epistemological aspects of agenda-setting as ranging from simple to complex. The simplest model, he says, is basically binary in nature and is related to basic audience knowledge. If the media do not disclose an issue that exists outside the everyday environment of the audience, then it simply does not become part of their personal agenda. McCombs (1977) states,

To a considerable degree, especially in the realm of public affairs, only items communicated by the media can appear on personal agendas. In this simple 0/1 situation there necessarily is significant linkage between media

and personal agendas, especially for items outside the immediate environment (Shaw and McCombs, 1977: 99).

This would allege that the media have a very powerful methodology imbedded within their practice of news handling. However, with the advent of the internet, I would presume that the sheer volume of news input available now compared to when he made that statement would have an influence on the agenda-setting powers of news media today. McCombs (1977) explains further that the complexity can increase from binary to multi-variabed as news priorities and audience priorities are directly proportional. He elaborates,

...such characteristics as display and position –page one versus inside, top of the page versus bottom, large headline versus small headline-and sheer length are key attributes of the stimulus presented to the audience...and...the sheer frequency of appearance of the stimulus is an important aspect of the learning process (Shaw and McCombs, 1977:99).

These characteristics have undoubtedly endured well and have even evolved into serial news events, for example the O.J. Simpson trial and scores of other crime and justice news stories ever since.

So having described some features of agenda-setting, I will discuss the topic of news framing as it is the substance of this research endeavor. Trumbo (1996) calls news frames “The themes that emerge in media representation of an issue (1996: 270).” A deeper description of framing by Entman (1993) places emphasis on “selection” and “salience” according to Trumbo (1996: 271). They agree that to frame news, the writers select aspects of the story that make it most salient to the audience so that it may capture

their attention and be meaningful to them. Entman specifies that the four functions of framing are: “to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and to suggest remedies (Trumbo, 1996: 271).” Therefore, objectivity may not exist in any pure form but is more or less a journalistic ideal. In the case of international conflict, even though the framing of such may be motivated by Entman’s functions, Beaudoin and Thorson (2003) charge that media do not offer solutions for resolution in their reporting of conflict among other nations and argue that “...nations and their citizens may use international news coverage to sculpt predominantly negative impressions of other nations, which can then lead to increased feelings of hostility (Gilboa, 2003:46).” Therein lays the inherent danger in framing news as even unintended effects can become unmanageable, especially where foreign and domestic policies are concerned. Tumber (2003) points out that “the culture of promotionalism has taken over many areas of public life” and that the blurring of party lines “has led politicians to turn increasingly to political consultants and public relations advisors” to assist in re-election activities as well as for policy decisions (Gilboa, 2003:137). So it would appear that politicians have turned framing into a necessary evil for getting the job done; therefore, framing of information has become a management practice that is unavoidable. Journalism practices then should focus on interdisciplinary approaches to news dissemination.

I see the framing of news as a property of mediation that may inspire an anthropologist to research further due to how subjective the realities of broadcast and print news have become. More so, however, news as cultural narrative is just the conceptual territory where additional research is needed. “Humans create narratives to explain the world, and journalists have been using this tool since the inception of

newspapers (Wardle, 2003:243).” Bird (2009) acknowledges that “we all know that ethnographers and journalists are both in the business of gathering information about people and constructing narratives about what they learn for an audience (2009: 4).” You could also say journalists do what they do to compose the screenplay that follows tomorrow’s headline. News does not just inform or entertain. News becomes part of or perhaps one of the largest sources for the content in our everyday dialogue amongst each other while conversing about life and the issues that surround us. When it comes to the daily news, “The facts, names, and details change almost daily, but the framework into which they fit-the symbolic system-is more enduring (Bird and Dardenne 1988: 69).” My concern is how news and headlines endure to become part of the everyday narrative of life with regard to agricultural reporting. If the headlines about local farming and the news stories that follow tend to manifest a negative frame, for example polluting farms, bad smells, et cetera, within the narrative of everyday news, then the audience may adopt a negative viewpoint of the farming industry as a whole. Bird and Dardenne (1988) point out that “like news, history and anthropology narrate real events, and their practitioners are finding that to understand their narratives, they must examine how they are constructed, including the story-telling devices that are an integral part of that construction (1988: 68).” This is the essence of what motivated me to conduct this study of content analysis; to determine what exactly the farm news narrative is about in Tampa Bay.

The new news

Many people express nervousness about globalization and the perpetuation of one world order. Certainly the rise of electronic communication will speed the evolution of all societies around the globe. I agree with Bird, however, that the internet has made some of the audience members more discriminatory as to what they will consider newsworthy. In addition, the web log feedback has given decision-makers a cornucopia of ideas and feelings from their constituents (Bird, 2003: 173,182-185). I further speculate the biggest value of web-based communications may turn out to be the removal of newsroom politics and economic agendas from adjusting priorities for reports since it changes the stage setting for the narratives.

For anthropology, more emphasis should be made on media studies internationally since participation online and the thinking that follows now reaches across the globe. As Bird describes the inevitable, mirroring Pawlick mentioned earlier, "... the shrinking and increasingly trivial coverage of international news (2003: 180)" should motivate anthropology to fill the void with new ethnographical reports of how media operate in other cultures. The knowledge of such will be essential to our political economy sooner than most thought, as the United States, from its shrinking domestic gross product, is evolving toward a reliance on global relations quicker than ever.

Cultivation and dependency

Indeed anthropology should continually invent its own paradigms for media study while borrowing from the body of existing studies. In "Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research", Bryant and Zillmann (1994) compiled a comprehensive array of

edited works that address several topics of media study. There were several perspectives that I found intriguing in the book because of their application to my study of farm reporting content. The first was “the cultivation perspective (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1994),” for example, which describes how television is “transcending historic barriers of literacy and mobility” and “has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (1994: 18).” Because of these phenomena, these scholars call for a shift from effects modeling, in which the research is limited to finding short term changes that are constricted by “selective viewing” of individual media texts and not “total immersion” (1994: 20). Such immersion, on the other hand, leads to the “cultivation” of attitudes over time and across various types of media. This could be the mechanism for the narrative constructed in the process of daily news dissemination. Anthropologically, this is interesting because it does lend better to the paradigm of holism that we take great comfort in as social scientists, versus the highly quantified and statistical cause and effect modality. Scientifically it makes sense, because as people have turned more to television for their news, they are more subject to the cultivationary style of broadcast news and how they develop not just the text of the story, but also the images over time until it becomes part of everyone’s daily dialogue. For my purposes here, I find that reality ironic, because journalists appear to farm each story for ratings just like farmers cultivate land for food products. Further, as Bird and other scholars have pointed out, the effects of framing and agenda-setting do not move in a unidirectional path, but follow more of a “continual, dynamic, ongoing process of interaction among messages and contexts (Gerbner, et al., 1994: 27).” For me, this reinforces how important a holistic perspective is in gathering information about cultural

phenomena, especially when approaching a topic that involves subsistence and the mediation of all its dynamics.

Media dependency is a concept that I found to be essential in understanding the cyclical nature of news narratives and what role the audience plays in news making. According to Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976), “The media system dependency model suggests that under conditions of ambiguity, as in the case of social system disruptions resulting from natural or human-made disasters, the mass media will become the public’s primary information source, and media effects will become more pronounced (Hindman, 2004:29).” Hindman’s research has also shown that in periods where major system disruptions occur, for example the 2001 Trade Center tragedy, that people will judge the performance of the news media more positively than in times of normality. This is an unfortunate ability that journalism has acquired, in my opinion, due to the fact that impressionism can be molded into thought-changing processes that can have profound social and economic effects, for example the reporting of “swine flu” when the human version has absolutely no relation, other than a few genetic base pairs, to the disease which is really named the H1N1 virus.

Third-person effect hypothesis

An article I found very interesting addressed the third-person effect hypothesis whereby “people tend to perceive mass media messages to have a greater impact on others than on themselves (Wei, et al., 2007: 665).” I believe I may also be guilty of this trend as I often feel I can think around the spin. The research by Wei, et al. was designed to find the significance of optimistic bias relative to third person perceptions of news

stories about bird flu in Taiwan. Optimistic bias apparently works similarly when applied to a specific risk assessment. Considering “the probability of encountering negative life events such as contracting diseases, people tend to make assessments comparatively and believe that they are less vulnerable to risks than others (Wei, et al., 2007: 667).” That research team found the two concepts to be unrelated with respect to psychological aspects but nonetheless statistically significant enough to consider them valid phenomena relating to mediated events. Applied to news about farming, media system dependency is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. The reason for this is that public health and food safety issues resulting from agricultural sources could fall into an optimistically biased frame for some audience members and

Currently, our country is facing the “swine flu” pandemic and the media’s choice of headline, according to the Fox Network news channel, was credited to potentially ending the pork product industry. Reporter Marianne Silber stated, “Hog farmers are fighting to stay afloat as global demand for pork has plummeted. In six months, the American pork business has gone from struggling to the verge of collapse.” This was attributed to the news media’s use of the term “swine flu” instead of the scientific description, H1N1 virus (Silber, 2009). Representatives of the pork industry have cried out to the media to stop using the term “swine flu” but according to the report, “the message isn’t sticking. Pork producers say some news outlets continue using the term “Swine Flu” and it’s killing their business.” “Georgia State University Professor of Marketing Chris Lemely says H1N1 is too scientific and too hard for most people to remember. ‘Once something emotionally connects with a person, a name emotionally connects with a person, they tend to remember it. The emotional connection here is a

threat,' Lemley says. 'That just has a strong emotional tie to people. The name 'Swine Flu' came out with that threat and we just encoded it' (Blanton, 2009)."

So, even though the third-person effect may apply in some settings, a headline perceived as informative with regard to an acute or immediate personal threat that transcends normal, everyday threat messages could lead to behavior change. In the case of this story, the behavior change of people not buying pork out of fear of getting sick, even though that is impossible according to the experts, has had a drastic negative economic impact on an entire agricultural product industry. This is undoubtedly a culturally significant event worthy of anthropological investigation into how perceived threats may overcome or even nullify the third-person effect hypothesis. Another interesting dimension of this report is that it objectively describes how the news media themselves and their choice of headline terminology are being deemed responsible for the possible demise of the pork product industry; simultaneously, they continue to use the term 'swine flu' in place of H1N1 virus. This shows how framing can become as natural to journalists as the message becomes to the audience.

Imagery

Another fascinating concept for anthropological inquiry, and perhaps under-researched in media, is the power of imagery. I believe that visual images are as essential to the incorporation of news stories into people's lives as oxygen is an essential element in the air we breathe. Bird goes even further to say, "indeed in television, the existence of a striking image will actually determine whether a story is used or not, especially on that rating-driven genre, local news, which is watched by far more Americans than

national news (2003: 176).” The image relative to my topic here that always comes to mind is the mad cow reports from years past and how the television news would play over and over the image of a sick cow trying to keep its balance during a prion-induced seizure from the disease and how this elicited such an emotional response from me and other viewers. Imagery conveys symbols and symbols are structural components of our individual identities, making this an essential area of study for the discipline of applied anthropology. “So far, visual anthropologists, many of whose interests include the analysis of ethnographic images, have paid little attention to news photographs; this is an area ripe for anthropological interpretation (Bird, 2009: 11).”

Advocacy and deception

Journalists are probably no different in their motivational structure than other academically trained professionals. What inspires and drives a journalist to adopt ideals and methodologies within the application of their profession is undoubtedly related or possibly identical heuristically to that of anthropologists. Agreeably, however, the field methodologies are distinctly different and worthy of consideration.

As anthropologists, we have come to understand from applied anthropological research that advocacy on the part of the researcher is not necessarily an unintended result. Additionally, advocacy has been exonerated from being an impediment to objectivity but rather a consequence of objective study by our discipline. For journalism, however, the concept of advocacy brings up interesting observations.

Ryan states, “there are people who will say that you can’t even put those two words-advocacy and journalism-together, that they constitute an oxymoron, and anyone

who has made a career as a journalist is familiar with the ethic behind that argument and respects it (LaMay, Dennis 1991:81).” Teya Ryan is a journalist who questions whether a balanced perspective or rigid objectivity is even appropriate in light of the horrific social conditions that come to light as a result of investigative reporting. She was the senior producer of “Network Earth,” a solutions-oriented program series that first aired on the TBS network on August 12, 1990. The series was an environment-based informational program founded on “its commitment to advocacy,” Ryan writes (LaMay, Dennis 1991:83).

Unfortunately, though, the mere existence of the audience empowers journalists and anthropologists alike to become the one with the ‘true’ viewpoint. Therefore, being human, either may be subject to withholding, constraining, filtering, even fabricating information as to play more influentially to their cause. So, if advocacy is inevitable for some researchers and journalists, then so should be the comprehension of deceptive practices-by anyone studying media.

Lee (2004) writes, “Journalistic deception is an occupational construct shaped by professional demands (2004: 109).” Out of 20 journalists with whom Lee conducted depth interviews, described as “an extended conversation with a purpose (2004: 99),” Lee found 14 to admit using deception in the course of their work. According to Elliot and Culver (1992), “justifications are offered routinely as journalists narrate their use of deception. Their attempts to normalize deception or make it socially acceptable demonstrate that deception is a prima facie wrong (Lee, 2004: 101).” So, as Lee points out, “situational ethics” fuel the justification process and as far as journalists seem to be concerned, deception is justifiable on a “case-by case” basis (2004:101).

Anthropology and agriculture

There is probably more anthropology of rural communities and lifeways that are inclusive of agriculture and agribusiness than specific ethnology of agriculture and agribusiness. This is due perhaps to the more interesting topics and subject matter like the Amish and their resistance to modernity (Hostetler, 1955), or the few remaining endangered Appalachian families and their deeply rooted and seemingly backward cultural practices (Keefe, 1986). These are interesting because they are both exotic and local and the subject matter that fits into both of those categories is perceived to be limited. I argue, however, that from the moment an individual decides to become a farmer to the moment where the first net-profit dollar is realized (which for some may never be) and beyond, there are sets of circumstances that rocket past other more profitable industries' challenges and difficulties, that indeed make agribusiness one of the most interesting local and exotic cultural studies an anthropologist could embark upon. In fact, there may be more journalism on agribusiness or agriculture in general than anthropological material, not including archaeology of course, if my keyword searches for germane literature were any indicator.

Alexander M. Ervin (1985) addresses the shortage of anthropological study on agrarian groups and explains that "...attention has been focused on tribal horticulturalists and peasants because the presumed mandate for anthropologists has been cross-cultural, largely non-Western, and methodologies had emerged for the study of small scale societies and village communities which were often perceived as being under threats of cultural extinction (1985: 36)." I would argue that the urban sprawl phenomenon places local farming culture in Tampa Bay in the same path of extinction and therefore in

critical need of attention by anthropologists. Ervin further argues, "...there is a need to maintain, or in most cases create, a more integrated perspective on agriculture for analysis which might influence agricultural policy (1985: 36)." Right here is where I must emphasize how important anthropology could be to the policy-making process surrounding the agricultural industry. Anthropologists can help bridge the information gap that exists between news media, politicians, and the constituency.

Peasants and farmers have been studied in varying degrees by anthropologists and a brief comparison of these two subcultures bear mentioning here. Ervin (1985) further provides references for which to categorically define peasantry and farming. There are distinctions between the two and they seem to be heavily influenced by geographical and cultural specificities. For purposes of anthropological enlightenment, Ervin's distinctions should be noted:

There are some features that might indicate some relative distinction between farmers and peasants within (a) continuum. Peasants rely on large extended families; farmers, although sometimes involved in extended family networks, more frequently organize their enterprises on a nuclear family basis. Peasants are subsistence-oriented and diversified with regard to crops and livestock; farmers are more specialized and oriented toward cash crops. Peasants are more labour-intensive; farmers are more mechanized. Peasants may be subject to more community imposed socio-economic obligations of shared labour and the redistribution of surpluses; farmers' enterprises are more independent of community demands (1985:41-42).

As evidenced here, anthropology as a discipline has performed far beyond the expectations of other social sciences in defining cultural constructs and providing cross-cultural analyses in the process. But I feel that applied advocacy research is still in its infancy in our discipline and my area of emphasis here is as deserving as any for more consideration.

Cognizance of a society's food supply is absolutely necessary on the part of its leaders and citizens and therefore anthropological studies of farming are essential to facilitate that understanding. Stone (2001) discusses "depeasantization" in the context of capitalism and its effects on agricultural capital. He also points out that the roots of industrialized farming began in the English countryside "before the 18th-century parliamentary enclosures" and it was here "that market forces were first used to expropriate land rights and force farmers into tenancy (2001: 575)." This fact is why my concern grows for the resilience of the family farm. Voters and politicians, unless they look to the source, are only given the popular media imagery and narrative for agricultural issues and thus the values of peasantry are completely lost on them. I have recently witnessed this dynamic, the domination of subcontracted farms by a large corporation, in Alabama where a close friend's daughter and son-in-law contract with the Tyson Corporation. Stone says these "food megacorporations...further proletarianize farmers through debt traps and extract wealth from local communities, enjoying state protection all the while (2001: 576)." My friends have told me that Tyson makes them upgrade their equipment, whether it needs it or not. Tyson finances all upgrades for them, soon after they start to see equity in their farm, and this has happened several times in the course of a few years. This business plan has kept them in debt with no resolution in

sight. These realities of megacorporate control will probably not be viewed by local news consumers, and if one looked hard enough, sponsorship by these corporations of the news media could undoubtedly be found. This would indeed be a vital area for an anthropologist to take interest in and advocate for small farm owners.

Press coverage of agriculture

There are mounds of literature on how the media handles a variety of social issues. However, where agriculture is concerned, there were only a few that stood out in my searches. Pawlick's (2001) work, referenced earlier, seems to be the most solutions-oriented that I read specific to the current lack of reporting of agriculture-centered issues. Though his emphasis is global, his discoveries and suggestions may be applied on the local level. He calls for better training and more emphasis on agricultural reporting within the halls of journalism academics as he emphasizes that "... the number of daily newspapers listing full-time agriculture or farm writers or editors on their news staffs has been in decline since the 1950's--dropping by well over 60 percent in the past 20 years alone in most of North America... (2001: 85)." Pawlick's book is a concise explanation as to the how and why of shrinking agricultural journalism and could be a vital reference for an intense anthropological inquiry into farm journalism. He asks, "...what logic dictates that amusements—or sports, fashion, music, or travel, all of which, as beats, involve more staff than farm news—should be considered more deserving of attention than the industry that supplies the food we eat (2001: 90)." I would also include crime reporting within those "more-emphasized" topics he mentions and pose the same challenge to anthropology.

For a historical perspective on agricultural reporting, Schlebecker (1957) is an interesting read on how dairy farm journalists came into being and how only two publications had survived up to the point when he wrote the article. He attributed their survival to both having a “large potential audience” and they reported on “vital issues.” He credited both journals’ owners to be “competent businessmen” who took the lead of their editors in creating a voice that echoed that of their readers. And lastly, he pointed out that both owners changed over time with the changing trends in their area of journalism (1957:33). I would offer that this journal article would be a worthy reference in a class designed for farm journalism because of its historical value and eloquence in describing how that era handled the mediation of farming issues.

Hays (1992) talks about the “pseudo event” which he describes as events that are planned for and designed around media coverage and how influential those events can be on public opinion. He asks two very important questions with regard to this area of media reporting: “To what extent do the mass media affect public opinion?” and “To what extent do planned events affect what the media report and thus, indirectly, audiences’ views (1992: 62)?” This is interesting to me because now we are introduced to another variable affecting public knowledge and opinion. For example, if an environmental activist group decided to plan a protest against the use of a certain pesticide on crops, created a press release, and then subsequently held the event, the event would undoubtedly gain plenty of coverage by local media and to some degree, national news interests. Historically, we have seen that the other side of the story is not attended to at all or it is reported ambiguously. Perhaps, in this hypothetical scenario, the several new chemicals, initially judged (early lab testing) as inert, designed to replace

that one protested agent, are largely untested as to their effects on the soil, the crops, human biology, et cetera. This scenario has actually taken place within the strawberry industry regarding its use of methyl bromide as a soil sterilizer to remove bacteria and fungi before planting. The controversy over methyl bromide's toxicity to humans began in California. The EPA approved methyl iodide, since omitted, was judged to be worse environmentally than its predecessor (Philpott, 2007). Florida, the nation's second largest producer of strawberries (Mossler and Nesheim, 2009), has had to follow suit and has had many challenges with replacement chemicals that are also rumored to be worse for the environment. Pseudo events, then, can be a powerful force for formulating and perhaps manipulating public opinion with the media acting as the mechanism.

Objectivity is a journalistic principal that may not be as ethically sound as it was once perceived to be. Hays (1992) calls journalists' use of objectivity a "protective blanket" that enables them to report events without responsibility for the consequences that may arise from the public receiving that knowledge. He further charges, "...the standards of objectivity permit journalists the luxury of a 'let the chips fall where they may' approach to their work (1992:64)." In the course of news mediation, then, objectivity could actually be a mechanism for bias because other crucial elements to the story, e.g. value judgments of reporters and consequentially the rejection of the value judgments of others, are omitted. An applied anthropologist and field ethnographer may take comfort here, right or wrong, in knowing that much more goes into their description of the human condition. Hays charges

...the mass media and individual journalists rely too heavily on event coverage and on the principle of objectivity in decisions about what they

report and how they report it. This has serious implications for the formation of public opinion based on incomplete and possibly inaccurate information. Policy decisions affecting agriculture and the environment can be difficult under the best of circumstances; they need to be made without deliberately misled public opinion abetted by unwitting media (1992:65).

The language here is strong and somewhat indicting, however, needs to be considered by journalism scholars when they train future news reporters.

Chapter 3

Research and Context

“That pleasure and power coexist, that critical understanding and gratification struggle with one another, that guilty laughter and embarrassed tears may be simultaneously evoked by the same messages, these are fundamental to the human condition.” (Mark Allen Peterson, 2002)

The ethnographical primer

As I described in the first chapter, my internship led me to an agriculturally-steeped ethnographic experience. I conducted informal interviews along the way asking questions that related to economics, demography, public opinion, and also the everyday mundane activities employed in keeping a farm running. I explained to the farmers I spoke with what I was working on and they were all very willing to participate with me on an informal platform and were even willing to be surveyed in the future should further study take place. These interviews were not intended to be scientifically analyzed, but rather to provide a heuristic. I needed to be familiarized with the culture of farming so as to make me an optimal participant observer and not a spectator. I felt that submittal to the IRB would not be necessary due to the nature of the population I was interacting with and the fact that none of the people I talked to fit into the category of “vulnerable populations” defined by the code of federal regulations (LeCompte, 1999: 57). The

interviews did, however, serve as a basis from which to formulate survey questions in the future.

The following are a few of the types of agribusinesses visited by my internship supervisor, Jemy, and I. They were extremely helpful in my adaptation to this area of study and I will forever be grateful for their time, consideration, and hospitality.

1. Agribusiness A, located in Tampa, FL is a provider of dairy and fruit juice products. The owner, D.M., provided information that will follow as a brief case study that I observed during my internship. D. has been extremely proactive in implementing best management practices (BMP's) on his dairy farms and is a model for other local farms.
2. Agribusiness B, located in Hillsborough County, owns and leases over 30,000 acres on which the owner raises cow/calf pairs and grows citrus trees. The owner is one of the largest grossing cattlemen in central Florida and always very willing to discuss farm industry-related challenges to help educate others. He is an active member of the AEDC and spends much time helping with the preservation of agricultural economics in Tampa Bay.
3. Agribusiness C, located in Dover, Florida processes and packs fish and other seafood from farms, and fresh and salt water sources. It provides waste water irrigation for agribusiness D, which we also visited, implemented after years of painstaking efforts on the parts of both businesses and agents of the local, state, and federal regulatory entities.
4. Agribusiness E is located in Plant City, Florida and is owned and operated by C.G. C. is a very innovative and proactive farmer and extremely revered in his

community. He shared about the many environmental and regulatory challenges he has faced since starting his farm in 1974.

5. Agribusiness F was located in Zephyrhills, Florida and was owned and operated by F.G. I was present during a meeting between F. and the DEP which was conducted for the purposes of environmentally regulating the closure of the dairy farm. F. was the first dairy farmer in Florida to implement computers in running his operation and assisting in the design of a composting program. When I asked him why he was closing his dairy, his response was, "I've milked enough cows." There is currently a large retail center on the property that has been built for over a year and Publix, a southeastern grocer, is the only tenant in the center. Were it not for Publix, there would be a vacant shopping plaza where a large productive dairy existed only 36 months ago.
6. Agribusiness G, located in southern Hillsborough County, introduced us to a program they implemented from an EPA grant that created a water treatment wetland to address the nutrient run-off from their dairy.

The informal discussions I had with those individual agribusiness owners yielded a wealth of perspectives for me on what efforts were necessary to keep a farm business equitable in west central Florida.

Questions related to the economy of farming were usually answered with positive responses. Other than the usual challenges to profitability, for example heavy regulations, weather, and family issues, most farmers seem content with their earnings and the ability to support their families and businesses.

Demographically, I discovered that every farmer I met was a member of a multigenerational tradition. Certain variables like crop produced or specific plot locations may change over time, but everyone I spoke with who farms now was at least the second generation and most were third generation farmers and beyond. Only a couple of agribusiness owners expressed that their children had an interest in carrying on the family business. Most expressed a disappointment that their children and grandchildren wanted nothing to do with agriculture after high school.

Every owner I spoke with felt strongly about the level of respect they and their products held within the community in which they lived and worked. Only a few seemed to be concerned with what public opinion may be regarding their trade; however, all farmers we met voiced a great amount support for public education and awareness of agriculture, feeling that the farm bureau offices and extension offices were vital to those campaigns. Their responses to how the local press handles public education were almost always cynical in tone and content.

Generally, I found a comfortable satisfaction amongst these agribusiness practitioners with regard to the lifestyles they lead. Like any economic sector, they are met with challenges that range from the mundane to paramount, but not one of them appeared to have faced any situation without the utmost gallantry to achieve mutually beneficial solutions.

I attended six monthly meetings of the Hillsborough County Agriculture Economic Development Council (AEDC) at the county's Farm Bureau Federation office over the course of about nine months. That committee directly advises the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners on all issues that relate to agriculture and its economy

within the county boundaries. I felt that I needed to gain understanding of the current state of agricultural policy-making and its effects on this economic group and these meetings were the perfect arena for me to become a participant observer and heighten my awareness in those areas. The following list (Hillsborough County Farm Bureau, Online) outlines the goals of the AEDC:

1. Discourage the premature conversion of productive farmland to non-agricultural use.
2. Minimize the impact of the regulatory process on agriculture's ability to conduct business, while still achieving the goals of those regulations.
3. Improve the economic sustainability of agriculture in Hillsborough County through increased marketing options, alternative crops, value-added processing, capital financing opportunities, and identification of barriers to the expansion or sustainability of agriculture.
4. Promote the expansion and relocation of agribusiness firms to Hillsborough County.

My goal was simply to listen to the issues that the AEDC confronted and learn about the process of how they disseminate information and advise the county commissioners on those issues. I was asked for my input on several occasions by council members and did my best to answer them as a fellow agriculturalist and not as an anthropologist representing the discipline of applied anthropology. However, from that experience, I have formulated recommendations for Farm Bureau and AEDC in the following chapter that may be useful later on in their public relations activities.

Methodology

I examined by reading, viewing, and listening to the news output from the most popular news sources in Tampa Bay. There are two major newspaper publishers, the *Tampa Tribune* and the *Saint Petersburg Times*. I performed both keyword searches on the internet and also clipped articles from hard copy editions. All four major national television networks have a representative local news channel in the Tampa area and they are: Fox Network's WTVT channel 13 news, CBS Network's WTSP channel 10 news, NBC Network's WFLA channel 8 news, and ABC Network's WFTS channel 28 news. A smaller more independent network owned by the local cable provider, Brighthouse Communications, Bay News 9, was also monitored. I performed keyword searches on the internet and monitored live news stories on television for each channel. The keyword searches performed for channel 8 news and the Tampa Tribune were performed on a website on which the two entities partner, known as TBO.com, which stands for Tampa Bay Online. The keywords that were input were farm, farming, agriculture, and agribusiness, in an attempt to reference news stories that were specific to this industry in Tampa Bay. Further keyword searches were performed on the basis of the most popular and prevalent farm commodities in the Tampa area and included the terms 'strawberry', 'beef', 'citrus', 'hay', 'poultry', and 'dairy'. Obviously the search could be expanded to include every known agricultural product-related term that relates to those produced in the Tampa Bay region; however, that would extend the complexity way beyond the scope of this study and would therefore be appropriate in further research activities. Each news story had to be read for content and selected on a basis of its relevance to the local industry of farming and also farm-related content from outside the geographical area of

Tampa. I found that to focus only on local news stories that were specifically about local farms produced too few reports for analysis. This should not skew results due to the fact that any news story, told locally and framed in such a way that the narrative adds to the sphere of public opinion about the farming industry, has the potential to affect policy. Opinion pieces and editorial articles were not considered for this analysis as they would not necessarily reflect the framing of news by the news media themselves. The keyword searches returned a considerable number of stories that had little or no relevance to farming due to some abstract usage of the terms being searched for. Those stories were not considered for this study. The criteria for an article or news story being chosen for analysis were that the content of the text had to describe something relevant to a local farm or farmer. The requirement was intentionally generalized so that a true holistic view could be obtained for how these media outlets framed their news relating to agriculture. To exclude any content that was pertinent to farming would mean that the framing description to follow would be incomplete. The news stories were gathered and organized chronologically from April 15, 2000 to October, 11, 2009, nearly nine years of news reports on agricultural topics.

Next, I needed to standardize the frames in which to place each news story after the content was analyzed. I believe that the basis for which to formulate these criteria should be that the content could be assimilated in such a way that an individual audience member may form an opinion, either positive or negative, or feel objectively informed so as to remain in a state of neutrality. My reasoning for this formulation is based upon the common knowledge that public opinion is what largely drives policy decisions.

Since the concepts of positivism, negativity, and neutrality are highly subjective relative to each audience member, I should establish boundaries familiar to the study of anthropology and social science as a whole. Primarily, however, because news framing's potential influence on policy is what I consider to be at stake for agriculture, a simple operative definition would be a logical place to begin formulating these criteria.

I chose to obtain the most current and modern definitions for the terms 'positive, negative, and neutral since I am researching media framing in the here and now; therefore, I utilized the internet to develop my definitions.

The word 'positive' is defined in the Webster's online dictionary as "involving advantage or good" and "of or relating to positivism (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2009)." These definitions will operate well in this context of research due to the first definition's semantic simplicity and the second definition's use of the term 'positivism' as this has been a well discussed topic among social scientists since Auguste Comte developed the idea in his six-volumes, *The Course of Positive Philosophy* between 1830 and 1842 (Bernard, 2006: 13). In order to ground this definition for the purposes of this study and establish it as most germane to the analysis of agricultural news framing, Bernard's (2006) following explanation fits well:

The central position of positivism is that experience is the foundation of knowledge. We record what we experience—what we see others do, what we hear others say, what we feel others feel. The quality of the recording, then, becomes the key to knowledge. Can we, in fact, record what others do, say, and feel? Yes, of course we can. Are there pitfalls in doing so? Yes, of course there are. To some social researchers, these pitfalls are

evidence of natural limits to a science of humanity; to others, like me, they are a challenge to extend the current limits by improving measurement.

The fact that knowledge is tentative is something we all learn to live with (18).

So, when I categorize a news story as being ‘positively’ framed, then the following conditions will apply to the text and accompanying imagery upon reading, hearing, or viewing: an opinion is conceived on the part of the analyst, myself, that evokes a feeling that some good or advantage may take place during the course, or as a result of the reported event on behalf of the subject members, participants, the audience, or all three; the news story will speak to the audience as if from first-hand experience; the quality of the news story will be easily judged as high-quality, well researched and articulated information even if there is clear room for improvement in the quality of that report. Right here I should point out that the terms ‘subject members’, ‘participants’, and ‘audience’ are considered to be comprised of people who make up the total of the food consuming population that will be affected by local media framing. As Bernard indicated that knowledge is indeed tentative, then so is the analysis of the content of knowledge and its narrative; therefore, as a learned anthropologist, I must consider that what may appear as a positively framed news story about agriculturalists today, may be viewed as the opposite following certain cultural or biological evolutionary changes. This, I believe, is the very essence of what makes anthropology a great academic discipline in that no discovery is ever considered by the researcher to be exclusive and static; without being deeply humbled by the oft wondrous implications as it unfolds.

Negatively framed stories should be discernable by their lack of the above mentioned qualities or simply being completely opposed to them. Webster's online defines the term 'negative' as "Characterized by or displaying negation or denial or opposition or resistance; having no positive features; having the quality of something harmful or unpleasant (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2009)." Therefore, for an article or broadcast news story to be considered for placement into the 'negatively framed' category, it must solicit an opinion based on feelings opposite to those evoked by a 'positively framed' news item and leave the reader or viewer with a sense that there could be harmful or unpleasant outcomes on behalf of the subject members, participants, and audience members as a result of the event(s) or issue(s) being reported on.

As discussed in the literature review, pure objectivity is theoretically unobtainable due to the human factor in researching and reporting news worthy events. However, to create a third framing category, and to avoid an either/-or data set that really would not be considerate of a holistic analysis, the term 'neutral' will be applied to reflect qualities inherent within news stories that do not fit strongly into the 'positive' and 'negative' categories. Additionally, I feel that a journalist who is self-reflective, well informed, and culturally aware, is one who can obtain a level of objectivity necessary to flatly inform an audience member and be outside a narrative far enough to avoid creating an opinion based upon positive or negative feelings elicited purely from the framing of the content. Let me state quite emphatically that I only hypothesize that I will find a news story that qualifies as 'neutral', or 'unframed' for my purposes here, but I realize that it would require agreement by several scholars more qualified than me to establish it as so. 'Neutral' is defined by Webster's online as "of no distinctive quality or characteristics or

type; lacking distinguishing quality or characteristics; not supporting or favoring either side in a war, dispute, or contest (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2009)." This may be the most difficult category to select for, so I intend to look for news content that is clearly presented in a way that avoids being framed with any qualities of positivism or negativity that were previously established.

Before analyzing the content of the procured news stories, I chose to consider the following definition by Waples and Berelson (1941): "Systematic content analysis attempts to define more causal descriptions of the content, so as to show objectively the nature and relative strength of the stimuli applied to the reader or listener (Berelson, 1952:14)." My described qualifications for how these news stories were framed seem to fit with this definition; however, Berelson (1952: 15) describes six characteristics of content analysis that should help qualify my methodology:

1. It applies only to social science generalizations (Leites & Pool, 1942).
2. It applies only, or primarily, to the determination of the effects of communications (Waples & Berelson, 1941).
3. It applies only to the syntactic and semantic dimensions of language (Leites & Pool, 1942).
4. It must be "objective" (Waples & Berelson, 1941; Leites & Pool, 1942; Janis, 1949; Kaplan, 1943).
5. It must be "systematic" (Leites & Pool, 1942; Kaplan & Goldsen, 1949; Kaplan, 1943).
6. It must be quantitative (Waples & Berelson, 1941; Leites & Pool, 1942; Kaplan & Goldsen, 1949; Janis, 1949; Kaplan, 1943).

The first two qualifications are obviously met by the context of this research. As for the syntactic and semantic characteristics, Berelson states that “content analysis is ordinarily limited to the manifest content of the communication and is not normally done directly in terms of latent intentions which the content may express nor the latent responses which it may elicit (1952: 16).” My analysis should further qualify as I am not attempting to project what causes and effects may be possible resulting from the types of framing I find in these news stories, and have taken steps to avoid the “pragmatic dimension (Berelson, 1952:16)” by excluding my own experiences and value judgments while attempting to characterize how each story is framed. Objectivity should prevail through the standardization of definitions for the three categories. The methods and results should be reproducible as a result of this. The gathering of news stories and the categorization were done systematically, applying the same methods to each story selected and analyzed. Although minimally quantitative, this study will apply rudimentary numerical values to each category’s frequency relative to the total of news stories analyzed. Since this study is primarily qualitative and only quasi-quantitative, though, I should make one final justification for its design: “A great number of non-numerical content studies call for attention by virtue of their general contributions in insight and interest (Berelson, 1952:114).”

Chapter 4

Conclusion

“Our ultimate dependence on agriculture—as individuals and as a society—makes farming a different kind of business and industry. Farming depends upon seasons, climate, and basic biological processes.”

(Ronald C. Wimberley, 2002)

To the above quote, I would add political processes to the list of the factors upon which farming depends. The results, conclusions, implications, and suggestions that follow will hopefully be contributory in some way to the great body of agricultural, communication, and anthropological data, both existing and hereafter.

Results

Of the hundreds of news stories returned on keyword searches and monitored on television and newspapers, a total of 228 reports were selected for framing analysis due to the salient nature of their content. Over the nearly nine year time span, I was able to obtain a representative sample from each news source I listed earlier so that if a pattern emerged from one or more news sources, that pattern should be recognizable, although no claim for statistical significance is made. The first recognizable fact was that the two newspapers dominated the volume of stories collected. Printed news stories totaled 132 while broadcast news stories made up the remaining 96 reports.

As predicted, recognizing a news story for placement into the 'neutral' category was not unproblematic and required multiple readings of the story while rigorously applying the established criteria. The criteria were expanded in the process of content analysis as certain semantic qualities stood out from the body of the text or headline. An example would be the use of words like 'fear,' 'anger,' and 'threat' in one type of article versus the use of words like 'sweet,' 'celebrate,' or 'success' in another type of article. Articles that clearly avoided positive or negative framing were found to predominantly quote their sources, list statistical facts, not include writer opinions, summarize without the use of negative or positive connotations, and their headlines were simply relevant to the content of the article without implying any negative or positive effect(s). A sum of 28 articles met these conditions, making the percentage of "neutral" news stories approximately 12.3%. There was a variety of content in these reports ranging from predominantly weather issues to political highlights to human interest stories. There were no articles classified as neutral found from May 12, 2006 until January 2, 2008.

Roughly 21.5% (49) of the news stories analyzed were determined to be positively framed. Each contained a story line consistent with positive values, for example advocacy toward farming, nutritional merit, farmland preservation, agricultural viability, community benefits, et cetera. Semantically and syntactically, those news stories were told and arranged in such a way as to inform the audience while predicating some element of optimism upon the overall 'picture' the writer conveyed. Headlines often conformed to the style of 'cute' or 'folksy' as described earlier, for example, "This really takes the shortcake," in an article about genetic varieties of strawberries (Velde, 2009). Several articles described farmers' triumphs over environmental challenges such

as weather and insects while speaking hopefully about seasonal yields. Of the 49 stories, 31 were written or broadcast in 2009, so about 63.3% of the positively framed news reports occurred in the final 10 months of those reports analyzed. Of those 31, most were from the *Tampa Tribune* and the *St. Petersburg Times* and were relatively equally distributed between each news source.

The total number of negatively framed news reports was 147, accounting for nearly 64.5 % of all the news stories analyzed. Of the 96 television news stories, 79 were included into the 'negative' group. Therefore, approximately 34.6% of all reports gathered were broadcast and classified as negative; this is a notable statistic. I found this group to be the least problematic to classify, due to the writers' use of words within the headlines and body of the reports that clearly carried negative connotations. The most prevalent words were 'threat', 'disease', 'fear(s)', 'crisis', 'conflict', and 'pollution'. Of all the headlines for the 147 negatively classified reports, the most noteworthy was found on WTSP, channel 10, the local CBS affiliate, and was titled, "Mad cow disease discovered in the United States (10 Connects.com, 2003)." The first sentence of the report, however, tells a different story, "Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman says the first-ever U.S. case of mad cow disease is suspected in a single cow in Washington state, but the American food supply is safe (10 Connects.com, 2003)." The operative words here are 'suspected' and 'safe' which contrast a great deal with the headline. Four days later, the one diseased animal was pinpointed to have originated in Canada (10 Connects.com, 2003). This was the finest example of sensationalization that I discovered among the stories I studied and coincided with findings by Whitaker and Dyer (2000) in which they found "The depth in reporting of environmental and food safety issues is

lacking (2000: 132).” The news stories I classified as negatively framed carried a diverse range of agriculture-related topics. The dominant issues had public health implications, such as pollution from farms, public protests of odors, poisoning, and disease. These findings also agree with Whitaker and Dyer (2000) in their comparison study between news magazines and agricultural magazines (p. 131). Disease stories were not found to be qualified with statistical frequencies. The second most prevalent issues were indicative of economics, as they pertained to the survival of farms, crop yields, government aid, and costs to consumers. Again, statistical evidence rarely occurred in the description of these certain cause and effect-based news reports. Commonly, when numbers were used to reinforce facts, i.e. monetary impacts, they tended to be large numbers, most often into the millions and billions. There appeared to be a relatively equal distribution between news stories that contained negative events happening to farms and farmers versus reports about negative events that occurred because of farms or farmers. The former scenario was comprised of stories mostly about environmental pressures and encroachment by development and the latter were predominantly public health-related. Generally speaking, after several analyses of the 147 articles deemed negative in the framing of their content, I felt a strong sense of desperation for the farming industry and its image as whole for this Tampa Bay region.

There were a total of four news reports, approximately 1.75% of the total, that could not be classified in any of the above three categories. The best way to describe these stories is to say that they would be considered neutral were it not for some clear contradictory message within the content or included imagery of the report. For instance, my favorite one of these outliers was a newspaper article in the *St. Petersburg Times* by

Janet Zink on November 26, 2003. The headline read, “City dwellers meet farm at downtown festival.” The body of the article was a somewhat folksy description of the event that was held in downtown Tampa. That event was intended to expose urbanites to local farm commodities and culture. So, this story could be perceived as neutrally informative with a positive sense except for the large photo that accompanied the article and was almost the same size. The picture was of a very large plastic Holstein cow that was at the event to simulate hand milking for those who wished to try it; but next to the cow was a father holding his approximately two-year-old daughter who looked as if she had been frightened and angered as she was profusely crying (Zink, 2003). While I am not claiming a scientific basis for this observation, this did send a contradictory message to me as the reader. It is worth noting in this context that the choice and placing of photos in a news story is always careful and deliberate; many images are always taken, and the choice of which one to use does carry significance. The other three were similar in structure except the contradictions were within the text and not from imagery. Those stories simply left me with a complete lack of opinion of what feeling, if any, had been derived from reading them.

As mentioned earlier, a review of the agriculture magazines, *Florida Agriculture* and *In the Field*, was performed by reading through the publications obtained between 2003 and 2009. As expected, the practice of agriculture, its practitioners, and related activities were definitely framed in a positive light in the headlines and content of the articles surveyed. Surprisingly, however, the semantic content seemed straightforward and lacked any noticeable usage of value-based words and phrases. Particularly notable was the absence of criticism toward any particular person or entity. The majority of

articles were written very objectively with regard to causes and effects, whether dealing with everyday farming matters or controversial policy-related issues. I gained no sense of being directed toward any particular opinion during or after reading articles in these publications, merely a sense of having learned about something I had not known before reading them. My findings again agreed with Whitaker and Dyer (2000) where they noted "...little difference in the presentation of articles (2000:132)" between the two different types of periodicals studied in their analysis between the same types of media. I found with the publications I studied, however, that the agreement was only in a very general sense. The details of the articles I reviewed here were much greater in scope and depth when they focused on policy issues and stories of achievements by farmers. This is, of course, where the positive framing is most easily ascertained in the presentation of the story, but a lack of highly-charged adjectives was still noted. The use of headlines to grab the reader's attention is common in these publications as well. There were a few articles that did pose some negative prospect for the reader, for example, "Threat of cow tax spurs grassroots outcry" in the January, 2009 issue of *Florida Agriculture* (Basford, 2009). This suggests that some elements, for example a gripping headline, of media framing could be trained into beginning journalists at the remedial level; therefore, framing news could be seen as a behavior element in journalism as it appears to be independent of the environment a journalist works in. Further evidence of this is in Ward (1959) where he instructs future agricultural journalists on how to build a headline, "The headline is the salesman for the farm story. A poor headline loses a sale. A good one summarizes the story, compels attention, arouses interest, leads the farmer right into the copy (1959: 91)." He further advises on the use of active verbs to better 'sell' the story

and warns to avoid usage of stagnant words and phrases (Pp. 91-92). Therefore, one must look at journalism's methodology and training practices if framing were found to have harmful effects with regard to public opinion of farming and agricultural policy.

Conclusions

The analyses and their results yielded more shades of framing than I had suspected at the onset of this study. The exact role the media plays within the dissemination of certain themes encountered in the daily news, however, is difficult to understand. There is a clearly discernable narrative when it comes to reporting farm matters by the local news outlets in Tampa Bay, though, and I feel that the data returned from the analyses of the stories I studied is worth consideration.

Through the reading of what were classified as neutral news stories, I learned that there is a great deal of difference between an objective reporter and an objective news report. Apparently, by structuring a story in such a way as to heavily quote sources, subjects, and entities and refraining from opinion-based statements and overly negative or positive word usages, even a seriously biased journalist may create an objective news report. My expectations were that an insignificant number of neutral reports would be found, yet almost 13% of the stories considered were neither positively nor negatively framed. This is significant because it proves a news story can be written to inform without directing the audience in any particular emotional direction or attempting to flush out a rash opinion.

The positive class of news reports were indeed predictably 'cute' and 'folksy' and were largely oriented toward human interest content, but were also notably diverse in

their subject matter. A glowing example of a positively framed news article was in the *St. Petersburg Times* on March 10, 2006. The headline was “Strawberry life is worth savoring (Bettendorf, 2006). The writer opened the article with the following statement: “If it’s possible to still find a patch of heaven somewhere in Hillsborough County, it might be in a strawberry field.” The story was about the Parke family strawberry farm, their business, history, and home life. Mr. Roy Parke was quoted saying, “God must have really loved strawberries because he shaped them like hearts.” Bettendorf utilized words like “famous,” “sweet,” “luscious,” “humble,” and “legendary” to describe aspects of the Parke’s life in operating a strawberry farm. For those who trudge through farming life and barely make a profit, this article would seem to be a complete fantasization of what being a grower is all about. The article is a fine piece for elaborately describing the successes of a family-owned farming business; however, from my observations, the plush life of the Parke family that the reporter describes is definitely not the quintessential manner of existence for most farming families. In fact, the article paints a picture of a grower’s life that parallels stories one could read about a movie star as it describes the large strawberry-shaped custom swimming pool at their home. Framing of this type may lead the audience to believe that being a strawberry grower is to lead a life of affluence, thereby negating the real difficulties that most farmers must face these days to continue farming. News stories such as this one could even create an empathy-minimizing effect for the reader that may eventually contribute to an undesirable influence on policy. This article exemplifies the positive framing criteria that I outlined for this study.

I would reason that due to the range of positive issues uncovered by local news interests, such as farming innovations to better partner with the environment and

regulatory efficiencies introduced to aid in farming profitability, only the low percentage of these articles found is the main obstacle to be overcome. This is a surmountable obstruction to a better informed public with regard to agriculture and would simply require better-trained journalists who would produce more culturally-competent appraisals of farm-related issues and events.

As previously noted, over 63% of positively framed stories were published or broadcasted in the first 10 months of 2009. I would postulate that this may be related to the massive shift in land use that has occurred from what the news media call the “housing crisis” and could be due to the fact that news topics about home building all seem to be negative at this point in time. Since local news must talk about local issues on local soil, it only stands to figure that farming matters would find their way into the light as housing developments are currently devoid of life. The other noteworthy component to the discoveries made in this category was that the majority of them were from news print and not television. There is a pattern emerging from this study that may predict negatively framed news reports to dominate broadcast news. This finding would be in accord with other studies of local TV news that demonstrate that this genre is particularly prone to sensationalized treatment (e.g. Krajicek 1998). There could obviously be a myriad of factors contributing to this picture as culture and economy appear to be in a rapidly fluctuating state relative to other stages in our society. Generally speaking, 21.5% of 228 news stories about agriculture being framed in a positive sense leaves me cautiously hopeful that the trend will continue so as to counterbalance the overarching volume of negatively framed farm reports.

During the process of weighing news stories for their negativity in text, syntax, and imagery, I noticed a duality emerging as I read and viewed farm news: the farmer as victim and the farmer as villain. There appeared to be a fair distribution of each type of article. For illustrative purposes, a couple of headlines and their companion news stories that are emblematic of this dichotomy bear mentioning here. The first was published by the *St. Petersburg Times*, “Farms shrinking as builders reap harvest (Gray, 2005).” The article clearly spells doom for local farmers and points out that the only way a farmer could make money, in that time period, was to sell their farm. The article even quoted a source that recommended against young people becoming dairy farmers. The article seemed to favor giving in to development if you were in farming. Word use in the framing of this article included the following: “pressures,” “squeeze,” “lament,” “weary,” “problem,” “drowned,” “loss,” and “frustrating.” The illustration put forth by the application of terms such as these could not possibly leave the audience with a realistic opinion of agricultural practices. In fact, after reading the article several times, I felt increasingly influenced toward never beginning farming as a vocation. I did not find any recommendations in articles like this for people to get involved in their local farm policy processes, thereby empowering themselves to assist in the decisions affecting development. Another *St. Petersburg Times* article is a member of several infamous news stories about an extremely localized *E. coli* infection outbreak that allegedly occurred from children and adults visiting a petting zoo at the Florida State Fair, the Florida Strawberry Festival and the Central Florida Fair. The headline was “Officials seek link in spread of kidney illness (Nguyen, 2005).” The first line of the article reads, “Did they milk a cow? Or pet a goat? Or possibly ride a pony?”

First, to my knowledge, the petting zoo at these events does not offer the public an opportunity to milk a live cow. Secondly, the pony rides have no affiliation to the petting zoo. The total number of people who became ill was 15, 11 of them young children, but the article stated that more cases were expected to occur. As the headline cites, the reader would assume they all had a kidney illness. Actually, they all only had diarrhea, with some exhibiting ‘signs’ of the advanced phase of the disease known as hemolytic uremic syndrome or HUS. The article quotes the Florida Health Secretary, John Agwunobi, in saying, “They could have eaten undercooked beef, or they may have touched animals with that particular strain of *E. coli* during fair-related activities such as petting goats, riding a pony, milking a cow, or racing pigs.” This statement could be a glowing example of how ignorance is fostered by the misrepresentation of agricultural events from the framing of news. The “racing of pigs” he refers to is performed by an outside entertainment vendor to the festivals. In this venue, young pigs race through a course to receive the prize of an Oreo cookie. These shows are viewed by the public from bleachers where they have no direct contact with the animals; the pigs are handled by their trainers. Therefore, a top public official assigned a possibility of disease transmission to a scenario that would be highly unlikely, undoubtedly based upon misinformation. Besides, the food born vector possibility he states first should have created enough speculation to prevent the reporter from making what sounds like qualified statements of public health endangerment directed at these events. They are really only designed to help educate and familiarize the public with some elements of agriculture. Nguyen even places within the article a description of a 12-year-old girl’s sudden death following her visit to the Strawberry Festival, but with no accompanying

forensic evidence to back up the speculation that is implied by the article. The girl was found to have died from pneumonia, a fact pointed out in a later, much more benign article by the same reporter (Thalji, 2005). This story was written about over a two-month period by this journalist in a series of articles that are written simply in a 'learn-as-you-go' fashion. This type of reporting is severely problematic because not every reader gets the benefit of reading the entire series. There will likely be a significant percentage of those who will only read the first article and get the impression that agriculture-related events are dangerous for them and their children. The article performs quite well at framing a public health issue into a warning of possible death resulting from visiting an agricultural festival and being near farm animals. Never once did this or any other article about this event mention that both festivals had provided portable hand washing stations in close proximity to these animal-related activities with accompanying high-visibility signage instructing fair goers to wash their hands following animal contact. The first article was two printed pages long and therefore would have had room to tell a more complete story without slowly leaking facts over two months. These are two examples of the types of news stories that frame an agriculturalist as victim or villain and dozens more were very similar.

Considering the dominant percentage of negatively framed news stories, this brief and largely qualitative research project may contain, at the very least, some inspirational value for future agricultural journalism studies. In particular, the fact that more than 82.3% of broadcast news stories about agriculture were classified as negative is noteworthy. It seems likely that a negative framing of farm-related news is common, especially so in the realm of local popular broadcast news sources in Tampa Bay. The

selection of news stories for print and broadcast is commonly known to favor the spectacular and unusual rather than the mundane issues of everyday life. I see this trend as easily observable in the case of farm news and perhaps that is because of journalists' lack of knowledge and awareness of farming culture.

Implications

The effects of particular forms of framing agricultural news by the popular and local news media are potentially severe. Whether an article or broadcast news story attempts to humanize or dehumanize agribusinesses and their practitioners, the audience is given information from which to form an opinion. Such opinions in turn may influence public policy. It is well established that media have the most influence on opinion when audiences have few other sources of information about a topic (such as personal experience). In contemporary society, few people have direct contact or experience with agriculture, so news media have an obligation not only to inform but to educate the public on how every product they nourish themselves with is propagated. There are pros and cons to both sustainable agriculture and industrialized agriculture, but the news media do not appear to inform their audience effectively so that the public has the tools to make educated decisions related to farms and future development. Studies have shown the public to value agriculture for reasons of biodiversity, cultural heritage, and an “intrinsically valued provider” of nutritional goods (Hall, et al., 2004: 223).”

Wimberley, Thompson, and Labao (2002) reveal through scientific surveys between 1986 and 1991, that 64% of the public showed support for government policies that help small farms. There was increased support for family farms, while 53% thought

that large corporate farms get excessive governmental benefits (Wimberley, et al., 2002: 23-24). This would suggest that when the public is approached on specific issues related to agriculture, they do have issues of sustainability in mind. However, policy has traditionally favored industrialization and mass mechanization of farming. Therefore, news media could be the missing links between policy makers and 'real' public opinion, not sensationalized misrepresentations that could presume to represent public opinion of agriculture.

To emphasize the importance of the media's role in disseminating news about farmers and farming, Wimberley (2002) instructs,

“On top of farming's natural and economic risks, farms and farmers face still other social risks, which include farm residents' relationships to others in their communities and society. Also, farms, farmers, and farming practices are judged by the larger society on such things as their benefits from government programs, environmental stewardship, food safety, and the treatment of animals. The role of farmers in the political process is also subject to the perception of others (2002:1-2).”

People are free to seek out sources other than popular media to inform themselves about farming; however, local news media could perform a major service by filling the gap between the farm and the consumers with vital and objective information.

The consequences for interdisciplinary approaches to farm news dissemination are significant. Journalists have an array of professionals at their disposal who are able to assist in the understanding of how farming happens. I am suggesting that Tampa Bay news reporters, writers and editors seize the opportunities for improved agricultural

awareness that are in close proximity to where they live and work. They would benefit from attending AEDC meetings, Farm Bureau Federation meetings, attending local agricultural events without cameras and microphones in tow and most importantly, visiting local farmers to gain that perspective on how farming actually takes place. News media members might also take advantage of the knowledge of anthropologists in local colleges and universities who have performed field work in this area. Such approaches would surely contribute to dispelling bias that may be infecting the news narratives about farming in the Tampa Bay area.

To the farmers' advocates such as the Farm Bureau Federation and the AEDC in the Tampa Bay area, I recommend a new partnership for their public relations activities. Anthropologists, whether as paid employees or interns gaining field experience and training, may provide valuable assistance. Anthropologists have the holistic perspective to consult on issues of public relations from several different viewpoints, specifically the local news media, their audience, the farmers that are being represented, and the policy makers that affect everyone. I believe the addition of a trained anthropologist would assist in disseminating accurate information, and thus advancing responsible public relations and would eventually be viewed as an essential member of the process. "What society's consumers think of agriculture and farming is becoming more important and strategic for those who farm (Wimberley, 2002: 7)."

I further suggest that academia pay close attention to this dynamic between food sources and their mediated imagery. Mass communication departments across the United States, both in private and public colleges and universities should take inventory of how well their students take advantage of interdisciplinary study opportunities.

Specifically in agricultural journalism, does curriculum exist to further understanding of how to report on farming issues? As Pawlick (2001) has pointed out, the training in these areas has suffered huge losses across the world due to shifting emphases. However, I believe I have made a valid argument here for a shift back to an interest in farm journalism. I believe a step toward this could begin with journalism schools, agriculture schools, and social science departments creating a liaison position that would tie these departments together in such a way that curriculum analyses may contribute to better interdisciplinary opportunities being available for future professionals. This would result in improvements in the way the public is alerted to agricultural issues.

For the discipline of anthropology, working inside our own communities is a much needed endeavor (Greenbaum, 2006). I cannot think of a better adventure for applied anthropologists to try than the study of farming, both past and present, in the United States of America and how the news media report on it. Across our nation, agronomy is still prevalent. Archaeologists have made monumental advancements in supplying the public with knowledge of prehistoric cultural activities right in their own backyards and have subsequently assisted in the cultural preservation of discovered resources. Why not study to preserve sustainable agriculture in our own localities as well while advocating for better news reporting? My vision for anthropology's role in agriculture and its portrayal by the news is realistic. I believe interaction between farms, journalism, and anthropology is long overdue. For decades, farmers have grown accustomed to the presence of universities in their rural habitats in the form of extension offices. But rarely does one hear of applied anthropological activities in farming communities, especially in those that exist on the urban edge. I believe an excellent

opportunity exists for anthropology to partner with farmers and journalists in those communities. Neveu (2002) remarks, “It is impossible to understand the kind of journalism practiced on the local desks of regional newspapers...without focusing closely on the relations of mutual familiarity and interdependence between journalists and their sources (2002: 56).” Anthropology will benefit by collecting data and attracting a rural demography to the discipline so as to diversify the classrooms that much more. Farming will benefit as the data collected will be a valued resource for other disciplines, farming advocates, media, and policy makers.

Suggestions for future study

My current study relies on media content analysis, informed by my own knowledge of the issues gained through participant-observation. However, a next important step would be to add an audience analysis, to determine how real viewers/readers respond to news coverage of farming issues. A future study design, to build on the current work, would involve formal interviews and surveys (with full IRB approval) of agriculturalists, policy makers, and journalists. To achieve this, I would set up a conference room at the local Farm Bureau office, for familiarity, and invite a minimum of 25 farm owners or their representatives to view a series of news broadcasts about farming issues. The group members would be chosen randomly, but chosen in way that all commodities grown locally were represented. A survey would then be administered to the group for feedback. This survey process would then be repeated at a more neutral location with a random sample of local residents. The surveys would be read and statistics would be calculated to weigh responses. An interview with the

agricultural economic impact chair person from the Board of County Commissioners (B.O.C.C.) would be conducted with questions that were formulated to gain an understanding of how the commission gathers information necessary to make policy regarding agriculture and how they are influenced by local news coverage. Once analyzed, the results of the surveys would be shared with all members of the commission. The final stage of the study would involve a directed focus group of 1-2 representatives from the AEDC, Farm Bureau, the B.O.C.C., each local newspaper (preferably an editor and reporter), and each local news station affiliate. The interview from the B.O.C.C. would serve as the guide for the focus group. The focus group would include showing examples of news stories, both broadcast and written, to the entire group prior to any exchange of dialogue. The purpose of this study and would be to design an anthropologist liaison position to connect these entities in way that may improve reporting of agricultural issues, making them more informative. This in turn would hopefully influence future policies to improve conditions for farmers, consumers, and policy makers. Were it successful, this program could inspire communities nationwide and anthropology would have yet another demography in which to study the consequences of holism and interdisciplinary work.

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