

THE LAND-GRANT MISSION AND THE COWBOY CHURCH:
DIFFUSING UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A Thesis

by

KATY FRANCES WILLIAMS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2011

Major Subject: Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication

The Land-Grant Mission and The Cowboy Church:

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Robert Strong Landry Lockett
Committee Member,	William Brown
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ABSTRACT

The Land-Grant Mission and The Cowboy Church: Diffusing University-Community Engagement. (December 2011)

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Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Robert Strong
Dr. Landry Lockett

The land-grant university and the cowboy church are two social institutions designed to engage communities. Research is abundant on the former and limited on the latter. The purpose of this study was to provide a descriptive report on cowboy churches, while identifying the potential for university-cowboy church collaborations and examining the direct implications to Cooperative Extension.

Rogers' *Diffusions of Innovations* conceptualized this study and was employed to evaluate the acceptability of university-cowboy church collaborations. This basic qualitative study utilized a purposive snowball technique to identify key informants of the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches (AFCC). Ten subjects participated in semi-structured, face-to-face and phone interviews. Data were analyzed for common themes and patterns within the context of each of this study's objectives. Findings described cowboy churches affiliated with the AFCC, the interpersonal and mass media communication channels used by these churches, and subject awareness of Cooperative Extension. Conclusions and implications suggest university-cowboy church collaborations are an acceptable innovation, especially in the context of Extension

collaborations. There are relative advantages for such collaborations, shared compatibility through each institution's mission, and ample opportunities for trialability. County agents should initiate contact with cowboy church pastors and collaborations should be initiated regarding information exchange, horses, livestock shows, and youth.

DEDICATION

To all those cowboy churches I have passed on my drives home. This is because of you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for the support and guidance throughout this entire process. Dr Strong, thank you for motivating me and reminding me to reward myself after each small accomplishment. Dr. Lockett, I could not have finished this without your enthusiasm and encouragement. Dr. Brown, your outside perspective was refreshing and appreciated.

A special thanks to my dad, Dr. Bob Williams. I would not have accomplished this without your academic advice and fatherly praise. Mom, so many years ago you taught me to stop when frustrated and to just do it later. I fully embraced that philosophy, thank you! My sisters: Amy, thanks for giving me something to talk about besides my thesis! Julie, you are welcome for doing a thesis before you!

I would also like to thank the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches and all those who participated in this study. I am so intrigued by your mission and happy for the opportunity to share your potential and your mission with others. Thank you for your time and support.

Finally, I thank God for enabling me to achieve this task and for the all the lessons He taught over the past year and a half. I am sure they will all make sense, one of these days!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION	1
The Land-Grant Mission	1
Origin of the Land-Grant Tradition	1
Charged to Change	3
The Cowboy Church	4
Statement of Problem	6
Purpose of Study	6
Theoretical Framework	7
Significance of Study	8
Limitations of Study	9
Definitions of Terms	9
II LITERATURE REVIEW	12
University-Community Engagement.....	12
Bridging Social Capital	12
Institutional Realignment	13
Engagement through Cooperative Extension	17
Faith-Based Engagement	20
Theoretical Framework	24
Diffusion of Innovations	24
Diffusion of Innovations – Previous Research.....	28
Summary	31

CHAPTER	Page
III METHODOLOGY.....	33
Research Design.....	33
Sampling and Subjects	34
Data Collection.....	36
Settings.....	38
Limitations	39
Data Analysis	41
Trustworthiness	43
Summary	44
IV FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	46
Research Objective One.....	46
The American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches	46
The Atmosphere	48
The Arena	50
Location Variance	52
Research Objective Two	54
Interpersonal.....	55
Mass Media	56
Research Objective Three	58
Brand Awareness.....	59
4-H & FFA	60
Horses.....	61
Mission Alignment.....	62
V CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	64
Summary of Study.....	64
Conclusions	65
Implications.....	66
Recommendations	70
REFERENCES.....	73
APPENDIX A	81
APPENDIX B	83
APPENDIX C	88

VITA 91

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	Page
1 Sampling and Data Collection Map	35

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study is driven by two primary concepts: the land-grant mission and the cowboy church. An understanding of both is necessary to conceptualize the purpose and significance of this study.

The Land-Grant Mission

Origin of the Land-Grant Tradition

It was not until the ratification of the first Morrill Act of 1862 that accessibility to higher education became a reality for the common American people (Rasmussen, 1989). Prior to this legislation higher education was a privilege limited to the elite and professional classes (Bonnen, 1998; Herren & Edwards, 2002; National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008). The first Morrill Act of 1862 granted each state 30,000 acres to establish a college to “promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life” (as cited in National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008, p. 10). These colleges and universities, referred to as the land-grants, were to continue teaching scientific and classical studies, but were to be differentiated from their pre-existing counterparts by including education in military tactics, agriculture, and mechanical arts (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008).

Since the inception of the first Morrill Act, the role of educating the industrial

This thesis follows the style of the *Journal of Agricultural Education*.

classes has expanded beyond the walls of the universities into communities and homes of the common American people. Through additional legislation, the land-grant's tripartite mission of teaching, research, and extension, materialized. The Morrill Act of 1862, the Hatch Act of 1887, and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, serve as pillars of the land-grant's tripartite mission, respectively exemplifying teaching, research, and extension (Herren & Edwards, 2002; National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Rasmussen, 1989).

The Morrill Act provided resources to establish the land-grant universities and formally teach the industrial classes (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Rasmussen, 1989). The Hatch Act established agricultural experiment stations, which would work with each state's land-grant institutions to conduct agricultural and farm related research and diffuse that information to farmers (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Rasmussen, 1989). One problem emerged with the dissemination of this information from institution to farmer, in that the traditional farmer distrusted "book farming" (Rasmussen, 1989, p. 27). To establish more trustful interaction between the institutions and the farmers, Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, designed to better aid in the diffusion and application of research-based information from institutions, facilitated by county agents, to the farmers and their households, providing people of virtually every county with access to research-based information (Graham, 1994; National Association of State Universities and Land-

Grant Colleges, 2008; Rasmussen, 1989). A concept Rasmussen (1989) describes as “taking the university to the people” (p. 1).

Charged to Change

The land-grant tradition has spanned approximately 150 years. Through teaching, research, and extension, land-grant institutions have come to serve society by providing the people with research-based resources and information to better resolve the challenges and problems of everyday life (Aronson & Webster, 2007; Bonnen, 1998; National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Rasmussen, 1989; Spanier, 1999).

In the late 20th century, criticisms of land-grant institutions have suggested academia is out-of-date and unresponsive to societal needs and requires revitalization in order to sustain through the 21st century (Lerner & Simon, 1998; Kellogg Commission, 1999). While “democratic in the social sense” there ever-remains a sense of “intellectual elitism” perpetuating a one-sided engagement which controls the teaching, research, and extension provided to the communities land-grants were entrusted to serve (Bonnen, 1998, p. 33; Kellogg Commission, 1999; Lerner & Simon, 1998; Shannon & Wang, 2010). In response to these criticisms, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges asked the W.K. Kellogg Foundation “to examine the future of public higher education,” creating the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities (1999, p. 7). The evaluation from the Kellogg Commission charged institutions to return to their roots

and “go beyond outreach and service to engagement” with communities (p. 15). Engagement being defined as more sympathetic and productive involvement with communities and envisioned to occur through university-community partnerships. Too often has engagement been perceived as one-side, driven by university interests; however, this charge seeks to revitalize the land-grant mission of teaching, research, and extension through reciprocal interaction with communities and merging “expertise in communities with expertise in universities” (Lerner & Simon, 1998, p. 4; Lerner, 2010; National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Shannon & Wang, 2010).

The Cowboy Church

Popular media and news features describe cowboy churches as a “blend of rodeo ambiance and evangelical Christianity” (Applebome, 1987, pp. A12). These churches are designed for the unchurched population, targeting the working cowboy while attracting other individuals who share an affinity to the cowboy and western lifestyle (Williams, 2011). They consist of a come-as-you atmosphere authentic to cowboy and western heritage (Applebome, 1987; Grossman, 2003; Hodges, 2009; Martin, 2006; Melhaff, 2008; MSNBC, 2009). Traditional church attire is replaced with jeans, boots, and cowboy hats; services are held in western-themed buildings, rodeo arenas, and revival tents; hymnals are removed and praises are sung by country Christian bands; and the most unique attribute of these churches—baptisms

in horse watering troughs (Applebome, 1987; Grossman, 2003; Hodges, 2009; Martin, 2006; Melhaff, 2008; MSNBC, 2009; Williams, 2011).

Literature indicates religious gatherings of cowboys and their likeness have existed long before the twenty-first century (Applebome, 1987; Mehlauff, 2008; MSNBC, 2009). The recent popularity of cowboy churches has actually spawned from a larger movement of contextualizing churches to resonate with the lifestyles and trends of its community (Williams, 2011). Stetzer and Putnam (2006) attribute contextualization as the result of postmodernism, in which values of the modern or traditional view of life are rejected, making way for something new. Churches are contextualizing to break down barriers built by traditional churches and making way for a new perspective of the Gospel. The growth of contextualize churches is predominately due to their utilization of successful affinity marketing techniques (Chow, Howard, & Lambe, 2008; Johnson, 2005; Stetzer & Putnam, 2006; Waston & Scalen, 2008).

Scholarly literature describing cowboy churches is limited. A recent study by Williams (2011) found three core values of cowboy churches affiliated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches (AFCC), an organization designed “to resource and develop cowboy churches” (AFCC, 2010). These values included cultural relevancy, elimination of barriers, and empowerment through accountability (Williams, 2011). Pastors in Williams’ (2011) study emphasized everything about cowboy church has to be culturally relevant to the cowboy. To aid in creating culturally relevancy, cowboy churches break down internal and external barriers.

Such barriers include clothing, scheduling, the church building, content, and presentation. Yet, through the development of cultural relevancy, cowboy churches do not compromise the purity of the Gospel. The third value described was empowerment through accountability in which cowboy churches affiliated with the AFCC are held accountable to a form Baptist doctrine through the Baptist General Convention of Texas. This does not mean to say that cowboy churches of the AFCC are all Baptist, pastors actually discourage denominational terminology; instead, it is simply a means of securing reliability and credibility as a church.

Statement of Problem

The land-grant university and the cowboy church are two social institutions designed to engage communities. Research is abundant in regard to the land-grant institution and its function to society; however, academic research on cowboy churches is limited, providing very little insight to how these churches differ from their traditional counterparts or how they facilitate change within their respective communities. It is currently unknown if any interaction has occurred or could potentially occur between land-grant universities and cowboy churches.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive report on cowboy churches, while identifying the potential for university-cowboy church collaborations

and examining the direct implications to Cooperative Extension. This study is guided by the following objectives:

- 1) Describe cowboy churches affiliated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches;
- 2) Describe communication channels used by cowboy churches to diffuse information; and
- 3) Describe the extent of cowboy church subject awareness of Cooperative Extension.

Theoretical Framework

This study is conceptualized using Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations*, primarily employing Rogers' five perceived attributes of an innovation and concepts involving communication channels. Using an acceptability research perspective, the innovation of university-cowboy church collaborations, will be evaluated through the five perceived attributes of an innovation. The perceived attributes of an innovation include: (1) relative advantage; (2) compatibility; (3) complexity; (4) trailability; and (5) observability. These attributes aid in determining an innovation's rate of adoption and will be used to evaluate and discuss the acceptability of the proposed innovation of university-cowboy church collaborations, prior to its diffusion. In addition, this study relies heavily upon the concept of communication channels and the change agents, gatekeepers, and opinion leaders who may control or impede the flow of information through those channels.

Significance of Study

Statistics indicate today's generation is less engaged in the activities frequented by our predecessors; however, this is not to say today's generation is less engaged, but rather engaged in different and new ways (Putnam, 2000). As the Kellogg Commission (1999) charged land-grant institutions to become more engaged with communities and establish university-community partnerships, the exact manner of engagement or type of partnerships were never specified. With this charge, land-grant institutions are seeking new ways to re-extend the mission of teaching, research, and extension beyond the walls of their ivory towers. This study may identify potential opportunities in which university-community engagement may exist through cowboy churches. In addition, the American Association for Agricultural Education's *National Research Agenda* has made the scientific focus towards new technologies, practices, and product adoption decisions a research priority (Doerfert, 2011). This study may "determine the types of knowledge, skills, environment, and support systems that facilitate decision-making and adoption processes by individuals and groups," and "identify potential gaps in knowledge, socioeconomic biases, and other factors that constrain effective communication and educational efforts to various target audiences" (Doerfert, 2011, p. 8).

Limitations of Study

The findings of this study may not be generalized beyond the churches of the subjects interviewed from the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches or the communities in which these churches are established.

Definitions of Terms

Acceptability research: “a special kind of positioning research conducted to guide R&D activities on what kind of innovations to create” (Rogers, 2003, p. 253)

American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches “organized to resource and develop Cowboy Churches through enhanced training, assessment, coaching, communication, and connectedness through the movement of God’s Spirit within the Western Culture...” (AFCC, 2010)

Change agent: “an individual who influences clients’ innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency” (Rogers, 2003, p. 473)

Communication Channels: “the means by which messages get from one individual to another” (Rogers, 2003, p. 18)

Compatibility: “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters” (Rogers, 2003, p. 473)

Complexity: “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use” (Rogers, 2003, p. 474)

Cooperative Extension Service: founded through the Smith-Lever Act of 1914,

Cooperative Extension is a joint partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture, land-grant universities, and county governments, designed to offer informal education programs to the public (Grahman, 1994)

Cowboy church: a church that invests in cowboy and western heritage (Williams, 2011)

Diffusion: “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system” (Rogers, 2003, p. 474)

Gatekeeper: an individual who “controls the flow of messages through a communication channel” (Rogers, 2003, p. 155)

Homophily: “the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes” (Rogers, 2003, p. 474)

Innovation: “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers, 2003, p. 475)

Land-grant institution: “a college or university...that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890” (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008, p. 1)

Land-grant mission: Comprised of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, the Hatch Act

of 1887, and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. Together these acts aim to expand access to higher education and provide practical information for the American people through education, research, and extension.

Observability: “the degree to which the results of an innovation are observable to others” (Rogers, 2003, p. 475)

Opinion Leader: “an individual able to influence other individuals’ attributes or overt behavior informally in a desired way with relative frequency” (Rogers, 2003, p. 475)

Rate of adoption: “the relative speed with which an innovation is adopted by members of a social system” (Rogers, 2003, p. 476).

Relative advantage: “the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes” (Rogers, 2003, p. 476)

Social capital: “includes the networks, norms of reciprocity, and mutual trust that exist among and within groups and communities” (Flora, Flora, & Fey, 2004, p. 19)

Social institutions: structures of social order that shape the norms and behaviors of society such as family, schools, universities, churches and religious centers, the legal system, businesses, governments, etc.

Trialability: “the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis” (Rogers, 2003, p. 476)

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature presented in this chapter further conceptualizes the significance of this study, delving deeper into current university-community engagement efforts and describing the theoretical framework from which this study is built. The development of social capital is first described as the overarching goal to be achieved through university-community engagements. Efforts for such engagement are then described in context to institutional realignment, Cooperative Extension, and institutional engagements within the faith-based realm. This chapter concludes with an overview of Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations*, the theoretical framework supporting this study.

University-Community Engagement

Bridging Social Capital

The Kellogg Commission's charge to foster reciprocal interactions between universities and communities is intended to build social capital, which may consequently promote a society of "mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness" (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Social capital, as defined by Flora, Flora, and Fey (2004), "includes the networks, norms of reciprocity, and mutual trust that exist among and within groups and communities" (p. 19). Putnam (2000) described social capital as both a public and private good, in which investment goes to the public bystanders and the person or institution making the investment. There

are two types of social capital, bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital has a tendency to be exclusive and homogenous (Flora, Flora, & Fey, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Current criticisms of the land-grant institution imply a strong sense of bonding social capital, in which faculty and departments of similar interest bond together. The charge for engagement from the Kellogg Commission seeks what is referred to as bridging social capital, connecting heterogeneous groups “within the community to each other and to groups outside the community” (Flora, Flora, Fey, 2004, p. 61; Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) argued bridging networks between institutions and communities are “better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion” (p. 22).

Institutional Realignment

Following the charge from the Kellogg Commission and the discussions prior to it, many universities began publishing their blueprints and visions for becoming engaged universities of the 21st century; however, much of the research in response to the Kellogg Commission focuses on evaluating the current strategies being utilized to engage communities.

Graham Spanier (1999), president of Pennsylvania State University and chair of the Kellogg Commission during 1999, described Penn State’s strategies for engagement. From an institutional level, the university aimed to fuse all three elements of teaching, research, and service, in order to unite university expertise with other supporting institutional units. Institutional partnerships, previously severed,

were pushed toward reconnection, such as Cooperative Extension with Distance Education. A commitment to internationalization was expressed for building global partnerships. Outreach was also proposed through the online creation of the Penn State World Campus. Reward systems were arranged to encourage faculty outreach for tenure and promotion. These institutional changes were designed to more effectively facilitate institutional engagement; however, some intra-university collaborations between departments and programs were already in place and engaging communities. For example, the College of Health and Human Development joined with Penn State Cooperative Extension for a project called PRIDE to work with 4-H groups in local communities to build self-esteem in young girls. The School of Nursing operated two small clinics in rural communities, a project known as the Rural Nursing Centers

Almost ten year later, Aronson and Webster (2007) reviewed the Penn State's roadmap of engagement to determine outcomes of the university's realignment. Their research found faculty and student commitment to engagement had increased. Faculty had created an organization promoting engagement, while students aided in its promotion by petitioning for a civic engagement minor (housed in the College of Agriculture). This study also suggested the intra-institutional changes promoting engagement are more easily facilitated as compared to the actual development of partnerships between the university and the outside communities. Changes, such as the creation of Penn State Outreach, a unit merging Extension, Continuing and Distance Education, and Public Broadcasting, have positioned the university to

improve community engagement. Progress to actually engage with communities is slow, but steady.

Michigan State University proposed their World Grant Ideal in direct response to the Kellogg Commission. Simon (2010) described this ideal as relevant to contemporary society as it encompasses not only the needs of local ordinary people, but also the needs of ordinary people around the world. Initiatives from the university included research in Africa to combat malaria, working with local farmers in Asia and Africa to feed the world and improve farming practices, and researching the fresh-water supply from the great lakes to address issues of watershed management. These initiatives provided engagement for university faculty and students with global and local communities. They are partnerships rooted in mutual understanding and learning. Simon addressed the concern that a global focus abandons the land-grant mission of local service, by reinforcing “knowledge gained in one setting should be widely disseminated to advance the public good in other places” (p. 46). The intent behind Michigan State’s World Grant Ideal is to “take the university to the world; at the same time...bring the world to the university and to the state” (p. 46).

While universities articulate and express their vision for the future, research has also been conducted to evaluate current progress of engagement. A study by Weerts (2005) employed case studies to examine community perceptions of three land-grant university-community partnerships to determine the extent of perceived engagement. The partnerships investigated related to public schools, neighborhood

associations, and technology education. Research uncovered three areas in which community partners validated university engagement: (a) visibility and activeness of campus administrators and support; (b) readiness and willingness of faculty and staff; and (c) accessibility and hospitality of university structures housing outreach initiatives. Community leaders expressed concern for university deviation from the community-based mission. University agendas were often perceived to take precedence over community agendas. In addition, some community leaders indicated accessing the right people and information is often difficult among the complexities of a large university. Implications from this study suggested visible leadership and symbolic commitment to the community are needed to ensure successful partnerships, as well as the development of a “front door” between the university and community to facilitate accessibility.

The marketing of the university is another research focus, as universities look for better ways to articulate to the institution and the people its function and mission. Many land-grant institutions have strived to create a brand-identity, a way of marketing the university that befits the complexities of the land-grant’s tripartite mission. A case study, on the brand identity of the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences (IFAS), conducted by Abrams, Meyers, Irani, and Baker (2010), reported awareness, opinions, and perceptions of the land-grant mission from of agriculture professionals and community leaders. Key findings found agricultural information was most valued by respondents and the majority of respondents indicated a general awareness of the university’s mission of teaching,

research, and service; however, were unable to identify organizations that shared institutional research and information, such as the IFAS. When prompted about the IFAS, respondents produced greater recognition of activities pertaining to teaching, research, and Extension and more positive attitudes to the brand. Conclusions suggested for universities to concentrate brand and marketing research in order to promote greater awareness and more positive attitudes of the university mission to the public.

Engagement through Cooperative Extension

These initiatives, in addition to previous discussions on university-community engagement, imply that no one entity of the land-grant institution is or should be responsible for initiating or maintaining engagement (Lerner & Simon, 1998). Instead engagement must be institutional wide; nevertheless, there are some units within the university that are predisposed to community engagement and service. Cooperative Extension is one of these units (Kelsey, 2002; Lerner & Simon, 1998; McDowell, 2004). Incorporated into the land-grant system through the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, Cooperative Extension serves as a diffusion tool and a link between the United States Department of Agriculture, land-grant universities, and local communities (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Rasmussen, 1989). The Cooperative Extension Service is designed to provide informal, research-based education opportunities to virtually every county

in the United States, making it the largest service of its kind in the world (Graham, 1994, Rasmussen, 1989).

The predisposition of Extension to engage communities is exemplified through the primary function of the Smith-Lever Act: to further aid in the diffusion and application of research and information, pertaining to agricultural, family and consumer sciences, and related fields to those not attending the university (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, 2008; Rasmussen, 1989). A service Rasmussen (1989) described as “taking the university to the people” (p. 1).

As an entity of the land-grant system, Extension has been bombarded with criticisms of irrelevancy and unresponsiveness, probably more so and longer than the actual universities (Kelsey, 2002; McDowell, 2004; West, Drake, & Lando, 2009). Drawing a parallel to the demise of the Pony Express, West, Drake, and Lando (2009), reinforced the argument for Extension revitalization. Cooperative Extension was founded in an agrarian and rural society. Today, our society is neither classified as agrarian nor rural, as less than 2% of our population work on farms and 20% live in rural areas. We have emerged into a post-modern society, comprised of post-industrialism, cultural diversity and urban growth. As a result, there is a lack of understanding and appreciation of the Cooperative Extension Service by its valued audiences (McDowell, 2004). Revitalizing Extension requires redefining its niche and target audience to be more reflective of society, to expand and market beyond the agricultural realm and become relevant to new population of a new society, and

to effectively and efficiently utilize modern communication strategies (McDowell, 2004; West, Drake, and Lando, 2009).

Research by Telg, Irani, Hurst, and Kistler (2007) contributed to the notion of audience expansion. Extension programs are designed to vary in order to accommodate the needs of the targeted audience. Agents are responsible for promoting such programs within their own communities. Telg, et al. (2007) investigated common marketing and promotion efforts from Florida Extension agents. Promotion and marketing methods most commonly used by approximately half of all Florida county agents include word-of-mouth and websites. Promotion for the general public, those not frequently using Extension services, was most likely to occur through press releases, followed by word-of-mouth. The results implied county agents are most confident with their current or previous clientele; therefore, less likely to target the general public or non-traditional extension audiences.

Despite these criticisms, Extension professionals have the potential to be at the forefront of revitalization efforts, for both the land-grant institutions and Extension (Colasanti, Wright, & Reau, 2009; Weerts, 2005). Extension has, after all, “engaged the land-grant universities with the ordinary people of the society before anyone knew what engagement was all about” (McDowell, 2004, para. 3).

Additional research supports that the infrastructure of Cooperative Extension allows for more effective interventions and educational programs to be delivered to the public. Researchers found partnering with Cooperative Extension beneficial, as Extension is virtually accessible in every county and “provide[s] unbiased, research-

based information to the public in areas such as agriculture, human nutrition, diet and health, food safety, gerontology, and human development” (Rajeski, Brubaker, Goff, Bearon, McClelland, Perri, & Ambrosius, 2011, p.881). Through the youth development program 4-H, Extension has partnered with the Army to provide a formal support system, to aid in the development of informal networks among military youth and families (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Othner, 2009). These partnerships are organized for the Army to provide the program audience, 4-H to allocate resources, and the land-grant universities to provide program and staff development (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Othner, 2009). Extension has also outreached to the home schooling audience by coordinating classes and field trips for home school families (Knutz, 2007). Community gardens are another example to how Extension engages with the community and other agencies. Voluntad, Dawson, and Corp (2004) described one community garden project in which Cooperative Extension facilitated the engagement of twenty-two other local agencies. Krasny and Doyle (2002) described a program, which established partnerships between Extension and community center educators to facilitate youth involvement with adult community gardeners.

Faith-Based Engagement

As the Kellogg Commission (1999) charged land-grant institutions to become reengaged with communities, the manner in which reengagement should occur was never specified. Churches and other faith-based communities constitute

the “single most important repository of social capital in America” and rivals education as a significant contributor to civic citizenry and engagement (Putnam, 2000, p. 64). Putnam (2000) explained the social networks among churchgoers are significantly higher than non-churchgoers; thus, implying partnerships between land-grant institutions and churches can snowball and diffuse to a much larger community than just the church. The notion of partnerships between higher education and churches is not unheard of; after all, many of the nation’s first colleges had religious roots (Bonnen, 1998; Herren & Edwards, 2002). Land-grant institutions do not have the religious roots of their traditional counterparts; however, they have historically engaged with churches, although these engagements are not as visible at present as compared to in the past (Prins & Ewert, 2002).

While not a land-grant university, Texas Christian University (TCU) is also heeding to the call to become a more engaged institution. An article by Wang and Shannon (2010), discussed previous engagement between the continuing education department and local faith-based communities. After hurricane Katrina, faith-based and emergency response organizations approached TCU to improve their emergency preparedness. Through this partnership, Wang and Shannon found:

...communities of faith typically have a strong desire to serve others and have geographic presence in virtually every community in the nation.

However, these resources go largely untapped because most first responders and government agencies have not developed ways to connected with and engage their local faith communities (p.110).

This population usually goes untapped due to fears and concerns regarding separation of church and state (Shannon & Wang, 2010; Fowler, 1991). Societal problems and limited resources often demand the collaboration between the public and private sectors; however, Fowler (1991) argued some engagement with the private sector could jeopardize the land-grant's reputation as unbiased and objective.

Despite this caution, Extension collaborations with faith-based organizations is strongly advocated by Prins and Ewert (2002). With the purpose of kindling renewed public interest in such collaborations, Prins and Ewert explored Extension's historic nature of engagement with faith-based organizations. Since the inception of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, Extension has frequently engaged with faith-based organizations to resolve community issues; however, these collaborations were much more visible in the first half of the 20th century than they are today. During the Country Church Movement of the 1920s and 1930s, churches were deemed as fundamental institutions in rural communities. Colleges and universities, including Cornell University, offered summer schools and certificate programs for clergy to better understand and address rural issues. More recently, successful collaborations between extension and churches have occurred in international development and health disparities research with black churches.

A case study conducted by Mwangi, Aguna, & Garfoth (2003) on a faith-based initiative between Extension and Kenyan farmers, found religious organizations can aid in the delivery services of Extension. Kenyans have a tendency to value religion and distrust government agencies. Church leaders are recognized,

by the people, as a legitimate authority; respected as peacemakers and counselors. Due to the leadership role of ministers and the mistrust of extension agents, ministers were trained by agents to help advise local farmers. Conclusions from this study expressed that religious leaders are often forgotten, yet are key tools when working with cultures that respect their religious leaders. Collaborations between agents and church leaders help to build rapport with changes agents, to improve credibility among the people, to promote rural development, and to facilitate the transfer of agricultural technologies.

Churches are also influential institutions in the African-American community and are frequently sought to facilitate community engagement (Corbie-Smith, Goldman, Isler, Washington, Ammerman, Green, & Bunton, 2010; Goldman & Roberson, 2004; Prins & Ewert, 2002; Putnam, 2000). The success of partnerships between academic institutions and black churches enables professionals and researchers to better understand potential conflicts and expectations of collaborations.

Research by Goldman and Roberson (2004) compiled four principles for building church and academic partnerships. First, churches must be understood as diverse. Doctrines and denominations vary; therefore, not all churches reach the same populations. Second, there is a demand for mutual trust and expressed appreciation for the perspective of both entities. One way to develop trust is through pastor buy-in. Pastors are recognized as legitimate authorities and are in a position to advocate participation from church congregants. Third, the divergent philosophies of

the church and the university must be reconciled. Each group must have a respect and understanding of the priorities, traditions, and boundaries of one another.

Finally, some form of tangible and visual power or control must be transferred to the church. Fostering a sustainable partnership requires the sharing of responsibility. The church needs to be able to exert its influence and governance over the partnership, in a manner which brings balance to the partnership.

A study by Corbie-Smith, Goldman, Islwer, Washington, Ammerman, Green, and Bunton (2010) investigated the role of the pastor in building partnerships in health disparities research. Pastors expressed willingness to participate and encourage research involving their congregants; however, they will not spearhead the research. Expectations of research partnerships included clear and complete communication, shared faith in the researcher, commitment beyond data collection, respect for the church, and a need for the researcher to understand norms of the church culture.

Theoretical Framework

Diffusion of Innovations

This study is conceptualized using Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations*. Rogers' theory has spanned approximately fifty years, in which the five editions of *Diffusion of Innovations* has been modified and expanded to respond to societal changes. Over 4000 publications have utilized Rogers' theory making it the second most cited book in social science research (Rogers, 2003; Singhal, 2005).

According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (p.5). The actual process of diffusion is not being investigated in this study. Instead an innovation, also known as an idea, practice, or object, is being evaluated. Using an acceptability research perspective, the innovation of university-cowboy church collaborations, will be evaluated prior to diffusion. Rogers described an acceptability perspective as a form of forward-looking investigation designed to position an innovation to facilitate a more rapid rate of adoption. If the innovation of university-cowboy church collaborations is deemed acceptable, this study will have also described a potential communication channel in which land-grant change agents can diffuse information.

Rogers’ (2003) diffusion theory is extensive, involving multiple concepts and sub-theories. This study focuses primarily on the sub-theory of perceived attributes of an innovation and heavily draws upon the concept of communication channels. The perceived attributes of an innovation include: (1) relative advantage; (2) compatibility; (3) complexity; (4) trailability; and (5) observability. These attributes aid in determining an innovation’s rate of adoption and will be used to evaluate and discuss the acceptability of, the proposed innovation, university-cowboy church collaborations. The implications from this evaluation of acceptability may also suggest potential collaborations in the form of information exchange, thus utilizing the cowboy church as a communication channel.

Perceived Attributes of an Innovation. Rogers (2003) described the five attributes of an innovation as determinants of an innovation's rate of adoption. The first attribute, relative advantage, is "the degree to which an innovation is better than the idea it supersedes" (p. 15). This attribute is often perceived as the strongest predictor of adoption rate, the greater the advantage the more rapid the adoption. Relative advantage is often expressed in terms of economic or social profitability. Communicating the anticipated costs and benefits of adopting the innovation is critical to demonstrating the relative advantage to potential adopters.

The second attribute, compatibility, is the "degree in which an innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters" (Rogers, 2003, p. 15). Compatibility is based on sociocultural values and beliefs, previously introduced ideas, and/or client needs for the innovation. The more compatible an innovation, the less likely the potential adopter will feel uncertain about the purpose of the innovation and the more likely to adopt it. Expressing and addressing compatibility is commonly conceived as the role of the change agent introducing the innovation (Rogers, 2003).

The third attribute, complexity, is the degree of an innovation's perceived difficulty. Complexity refers to the barriers that may impede the adoption of an innovation. The more complex and more difficult an innovation is to understand the less likely it is to be adopted. Trialability, the fourth attribute, is the degree in which potential adopters may experiment and try the innovation. The ability to experiment with an innovation and allows for clients to learn by first doing. Trialability provides

an opportunity for clients to develop and attach meaning to an innovation and discover its functionality on the client's own terms. Finally, the fifth attribute, observability, is the extent to which an innovation's results are visible and capable of being easily observed (Rogers, 2003).

Rogers (2003) described relative advantage and compatibility as the two attributes most critical for enabling accurate positioning for the adoption of an innovation. Prior to this study there has been no indication of interaction between land-grants and cowboy churches; thus, there may be some difficulty in determining the complexity, trialability, and observability of this study's innovation.

Communication Channels. Collaborations could potentially exist in the form of information exchange. Anticipating this possibility, cowboy churches are recognized as a potential communication channel. A communication channel, as defined by Rogers (2003), is "the means by which messages get from one individual to another" (p. 18).

Not only can the cowboy church be a communication channel as a whole, but each church also has its own communication channels in which messages are transmitted. The transmission of messages occurs in two forms: mass media and interpersonal. Mass media channels include mediums such as radio, television, and newspapers, and allow for messages to reach a large audience at one time. Mass media is considered an important form of providing and sharing knowledge. Interpersonal channels involve face-to-face or small groups interactions amongst people with

similar attributes and are considered more important in regards to persuasion and adoption.

Rogers (2003) described many individuals who may affect the message transmission through a communication channel. These individuals include change agents, gatekeepers, and opinion leaders, all of whom may facilitate information exchange and affect adoption rates. Change agents are individuals who influence the decisions of clients toward a desirable direction of change. Such individuals have a responsibility to determine and fulfill the needs of their clients. Potential change agents in this study are land-grant faculty and extension professionals. Gatekeepers are individuals who control the flow of information through a communication channel. Cowboy church pastors can be recognized as potential gatekeepers. Opinion leaders are part of an informal type of leadership in which influence may be exerted onto the members of the social system, or in this case particular members of the cowboy church have influence over other members. Rogers indicated changes agents rely heavily on opinion leaders to secure adoption of innovations. Effective communication between the social system and these individuals is reliant upon the level of homophily, or the degree of shared attributes such as beliefs, education, and socioeconomic status.

Diffusion of Innovations – Previous Research

Diffusion of Innovations was originally defined in the context of technological innovations and individual level adoption of those technologies

(Rogers, 2003). Researchers continue to utilize Rogers' (2003) theory in its original context; however, Rogers' is employed within a variety of disciplines and its breadth allows for researchers to utilize it varyingly. Not only is it a theory as a whole, but Rogers also presents multiple sub-theories and concepts that can be independently applied (Hubbard & Sandmann, 2007). Emerging from anthropology and sociology tradition, the disciplines of education, public health, communications, marketing and management, geography, and agriculture, have since employed diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003).

Diffusion theory emerged as a prominent theory in the agricultural research tradition after Ryan and Gross studied the diffusion and adoption of hybrid seed corn during the 1940s (Rogers, 2003; Stephenson, 2003). Hybrid corn was an agricultural technology that revolutionized farm productivity (Rogers, 2003; Stephenson, 2003). According to Rogers (2003), the study by Ryan and Gross is recognized as the most prominent diffusion study of all time and established the research paradigm of *Diffusion of Innovations*. Diffusion theory is also recognized as the overarching model of the Cooperative Extension Service (Rogers, 2003; Stephenson, 2003).

A content analysis conducted by Edgar, Briers, and Rutherford (2008), assessed ten years of agricultural education research articles from primer journals. Diffusion theory was one of fifty primary and secondary reoccurring research themes. Research in agricultural education employs Roger's theory in a variety of ways.

Murphrey and Dooley (2000) utilized Roger's five perceived attributes to aid in determining obstacles impeding the diffusion of distance education courses within the college of agriculture and life sciences. Diker, Walters, Cunningham-Sabo, and Baker (2011), conducted similar research, evaluating the adoption and implementation of a school-based, nutrition education curriculum. Harder and Lindner (2008) employed Rogers' sub-theory of innovation-decision, to assess the adoption of eXtension among Texas county agents. The innovation-decision process involves stages of knowledge/no knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. Adoption of eXtension was impeded as the majority of agents reported only being in the knowledge/no knowledge stage.

Many of the studies involving diffusion theory allow for various client-based factors to be considered in evaluating the rejection or adoption of a practice, which is why Hubbard and Sandmann (2007) proposed the application of this theory in the evaluation of Extension programs. Strong and Irani (2011) specifically highlighted the concept of change agency in their recent study of students training to be extension educators. A recent study by Roberts, Hall, Briers, Gill, Shinn, Larke, and Jaure (2009) was guided by Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory using multiple concepts such as opinion leadership, change agents, and perceived attributes to increase engagement of Hispanic students in agricultural education and the FFA.

Research, outside the agricultural education discipline, has more recently begun to apply diffusion theory within the context of system and policy innovations (Makse & Volden, 2011; Rogers & Peterson, 2008; Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004).

Smerecnik and Anderson (2011) utilized Rogers to aid in understanding the adoption of sustainable practices of hotel and ski resort management. Makse and Volden (2011) have recently employed Rogers to determine the differences in attributes of criminal justice policies and how those differences facilitate adoption rate. Within the field of health education and communication, Rogers and Peterson (2008) took a similar policy perspective, combining Rogers' diffusion theory with agenda setting theory, to investigate the adoption and rejection of clean air ordinances. Schools as a whole often adopt new technologies requiring implementation by teachers. Researchers have employed Rogers' theory to better understand teacher attitudes and beliefs associated with implementation (Beets, Flay, Vuchinich, Acock, Li, & Allred, 2008; Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004).

Summary

The review of literature in this chapter reinforces that land-grant institutions have a commitment to diffuse information and research beyond the walls of their ivory towers. Establishing university-community engagement has encountered some difficulties, as communities are often hesitant to establish such connections for fear of university driven interests and lack of accessibility to the university. Despite this hesitancy, universities are striving to reposition themselves to better engage with local communities. Some land-grant entities, such as Extension, are already positioned for such engagement. Rogers's (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations* is frequently employed when investigating new ideas or practices. The utilization of

Rogers' theory allows this study to examine the extent to which engagement between land-grant institutions and cowboy churches may potentially exist.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive report on cowboy churches while identifying the potential for university-cowboy church collaborations. This chapter details this study's research design, sampling techniques, subjects, data collection, settings, limitations, data analysis, and steps taken to secure trustworthiness.

Research Design

A basic qualitative research design was employed to reinforce the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study. Merriam (2009) indicated basic, pure research is “motivated by intellectual interest in a phenomenon and has as its goal the extension of knowledge” (p. 3). Scholarly research has yet to delve into the intricacies of the cowboy church phenomenon; thus, a basic, descriptive design is needed to extend knowledge about this phenomenon. Utilizing a qualitative design allows for in-depth discovery of meanings, interpretations, and experiences regarding cowboy churches enabling the “essence and ambiance” of cowboy churches to be captured (Berg, 2009, p. 3; Dooley, 2007, Merriam, 2009).

There are a variety of types of qualitative research including basic or generic, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study (Merriam, 2009). The basic or generic type of qualitative design is employed in this study and is the

most commonly used qualitative methodology in agricultural education (Dooley, 2007). According to Merriam (2009), the basic qualitative design allows data to be collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, and the findings to be reported in the form of patterns, themes, and categories (Dooley, 2007).

Sampling and Subjects

A purposive, snowball sampling technique was utilized to identify subjects associated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches (AFCC). Snowball sampling is a process of chain referrals, also known as network sampling, in which a few subjects who meet a set criteria are then asked to provide names of other people who may share similar attributes or knowledge (Berg, 2009; Dooley, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The criterion of selection, required subjects to be current pastors, former pastors, and/or administrative assistants of churches affiliated with the AFCC. The AFCC is an organization designed “to resource and develop cowboy churches” and was contacted prior to the study to ascertain the organization’s corporation; however, the AFCC had no role in recruiting participation. As of June 2011, there were approximately 198 churches affiliated with the AFCC, 152 of which are located in Texas (AFCC, 2011).

Snowballing followed a top-down approach. Two subjects from the AFCC main office were first interviewed, who in turn supplied seven additional informants to be contacted and the snowball continued from there. Some subjects made referrals while others did not. The name of the subject who made the referral was shared with

the corresponding individual to solicit participation. If contact information was not provided by the subject it was found on the AFCC website.

A total of thirteen informants were invited via phone or voice message to participate in this study. If no response the first time, informants were called again with a second phone invitation approximately a week later. Twelve responded and ten interviews were conducted. Seven of the interviews were scheduled using the informant’s assistant. Phone tag with two informants prohibited interviews from ever being arranged and one informant never responded to voice messages (see Figure 1).

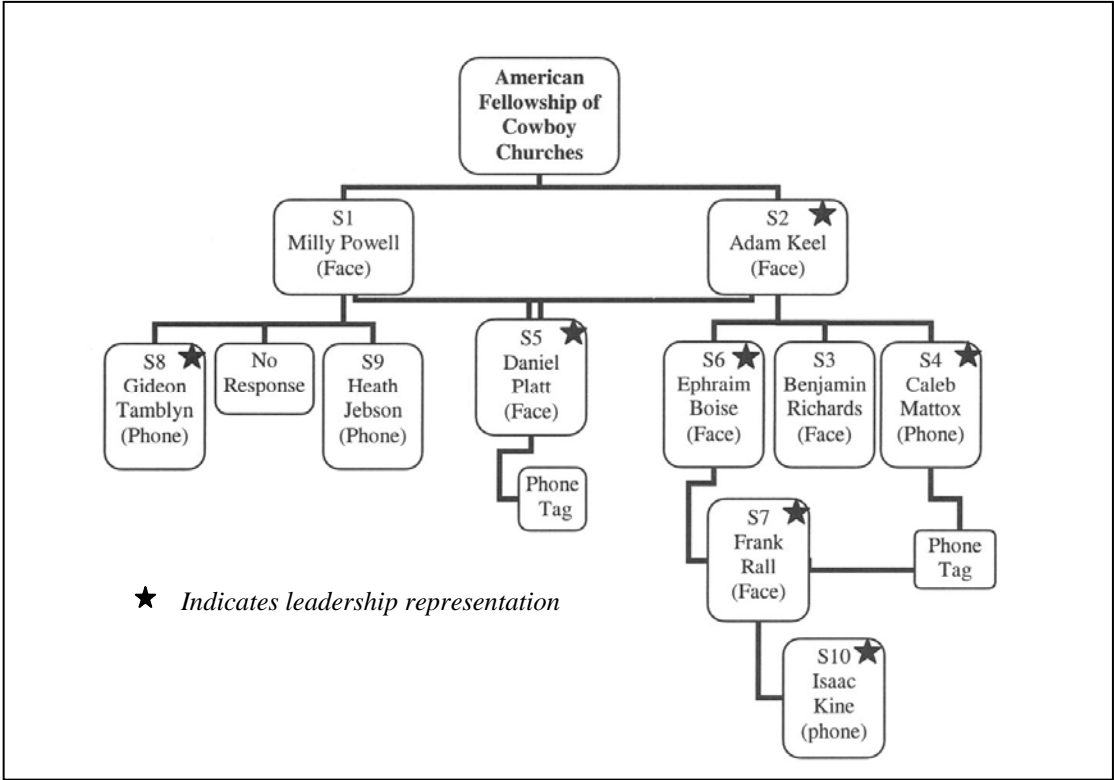


Figure 1
Sampling and Data Collection Map

The ten subjects of this study represented ten different churches and included nine males and one female. All subjects were from Texas, ranging from the New Mexico border, Oklahoma border, deep East Texas, and central Texas. All the males were pastors of a cowboy church while the female was an administrative assistant for the AFCC. The majority of the nine pastors were bi-vocational. Seven of the subjects represented the AFCC in an administrative leadership position as an officer, board member, and/or field representative. As a result of these leadership positions, many of the subjects discussed cowboy church from an organizational perspective only describing their church specifically when probed.

Data Collection

Dooley (2007) emphasized qualitative research is designed to be emergent and flexible, allowing for small sample sizes, and time primarily spent in the natural setting. Face-to-face interviews allow rich observation of informants in their natural setting of cowboy church. In addition, Berg (2009) indicated face-to-face interviews allow for observation of non-verbal cues and control of pace and direction over the interview. Yet, qualitative research is also flexible and emergent. Telephone interviews allow maximum variation despite geographical constraints and are most viable when specific questions are asked (Berg, 2009).

Face-to-face interviews were originally employed and preferred for data collection; however, various circumstances called for utilization of phone interviews as well. An unknown researcher bias surfaced after the first three interviews. Prior to

these interviews the researcher had anticipated cowboy churches to be generally the same and key informants centrally located. Subjects emphasized regional differences in cowboy churches; thus, challenging the researcher to rethink how to interview informants who had not originally been contacted due to geographical and resource limitations. As the researcher drove to her fourth interview, she received a phone call from the subject stating he was in the middle of working cows and was unable to meet her; however, he would be glad to answer my questions over the phone right then. After this interview the researcher realized time, resources, and subject scheduling were limited to complete only face-to-face interviews. Phone interviews were then conducted when needed (see Figure 1). The ability to make this decision is reflexive of the emergent and flexible nature of qualitative research.

Data were collected over a span of one month, between late July and late August of 2011. Of the ten total interviews, six were conducted face-to-face while four were conducted over the phone. One interview involved attendance at a Thursday evening service and was conducted afterward. All face-to-face subjects allowed for the interview session to be audio recorded. Notes were hand-written during phone interviews. Face-to-face interviews generally took 30 minutes while phone interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

Interview questions followed a semi-structured format. According to Berg (2009) semi-structured interviews allow a systematic and consistent protocol of predetermined and topical questions, while ensuring freedom and flexibility to delve, probe, and make comparisons as needed. Questions represented each of this study's

three objectives and were inspired by Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations*. Questions pertained to the AFCC involvement, recruitment and retention of members, cowboy church activities, communication channels, interaction within the community, and Extension awareness.

To ensure confidentiality, all names have been changed and identifiers of the subjects and their affiliate church removed from the findings of this study.

Pseudonyms were inspired by the movie *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* in which each subject was given the first name of a character and the last name of the actor who played that character. Written consent was obtained in person from the face-to-face interviews and via text from the phone interviews. All subjects were sent a hand written thank you card upon completion of their participation.

Settings

Interviews were informal and very laid-back. The setting of each interview varied uniquely, as six were face-to-face and four over the phone. Observation and inquiry indicated each subject's church was located outside city limits or directly on the outskirts of town. One church had a horse boarding facility, rented to the public. Arenas were common and also varied. Some arenas were defined only by pipe fencing, one of the churches observed had a covered arena; whereas, other churches had not yet invested in an arena facility due to the age of the church and/or lack of resources.

Face-to-face interviews were each held at an AFCC church. The two initial interviews were held at the AFCC supply depot, which houses a church and serves as the headquarters of the organization. The other four face-to-face interviews were held at each pastor's affiliate church. These churches strongly reflected a cowboy ambiance. Most of these buildings resembled a commercial barn design: steel frame, concrete floors, and pre-fabricated metal. One church met in a revival tent. Church interior was commonly accented with white cedar, cowhide rugs, saddles, hay, barbed-wire crosses, wagon wheels, western magazines, and western photos. Face-to-face interviews took place in the foyer, office, or sanctuary of the church.

Phone interviews did not allow for observation of the cowboy church setting and the circumstances of each interview varied significantly. The first phone interview happened on the researcher's drive to that subject's scheduled face-to-face interview. The researcher pulled over in a nearby parking lot to conduct the interview and take notes. The second phone interview was once again conducted from the researcher's vehicle in a parking lot directly after one of the face-to-face interviews. The other two phone interviews were scheduled and conducted from the researcher's kitchen table and office at work.

Limitations

A few limitations were experienced throughout the course of this study. One overarching limitation to this entire study was the lack of generalizability to other adult populations and religious organizations. Generalizations from this study are

limited to only those cowboy churches represented through this study. Additional limitations directly involving data collection included outsider status of the researcher, male perspective, interview transcriptions, and the gender of the researcher.

Going into this study, the researcher was aware that she was not from the cowboy culture; however, with her country/rural upbringing she was unaware how this outsider status would limit her ability to probe and delve deeper into questions. For example, the researcher has never been to a rodeo. Rodeo is significant ministry in cowboy churches. The researcher's inexperience with rodeo made it difficult to pick up on rodeo references, understand terminology, and ask the right questions to learn more.

Nine of the ten subjects of this study were male, limiting the perspective provided. The researcher was aware of this potential prior to the study, which is why the criterion upon subject selection included administrative assistants to perhaps provide female perspective.

Transcription of interviews posed another limitation. Time, resources, and geographical limitations did not allow for face-to-face interviews to be conducted on every subject; thus, phone interviews were utilized. Phone interviews were not recorded, but hand-written notes were taken. The researcher felt these hand-written transcriptions did not do justice to the information provided by subjects of phone interviews, as compared to those who were audio recorded.

An additional limitation, or more of a possible limitation, was the gender of the researcher. During the sixth interview, the subject informed the researcher that when meeting with women of the congregation he usually had an elder present in the facility. There was no one else present that day and the subject expressed a concern for the situation. He stated his wife and an elder knew that he was meeting privately with the researcher and if the researcher was in any way uncomfortable with this meeting to let him know. The researcher indicated the situation was fine and proceeded with the interview. Three face-to-face interviews with men were already completed by this sixth interview; however, this particular concern never arose, as other people were always present in the facility. Prior to this interview, two individuals wanted to meet at a centrally located church. Their reasoning was that they were closer to that church than their own churches; however, it is possible that they did not want to be alone and secluded with a female researcher. The researcher now understands how to protect her subjects and herself to be more sensitive to potential risks of sexual harassment.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of answering one's research questions (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions asked were semi-structured; inspired by the theoretical framework and systematically set up to directly corresponded with each of this study's objectives. The nature of a basic qualitative design calls for data analysis in the form of recurring patterns and themes (Dooley, 2007; Merriam,

2009). Transcripts were analyzed for recurring patterns and themes within the context each objective. Each objective was color-coded. Keywords and descriptors were written in the margins of the transcripts to help conceptualize themes. These keywords and descriptors were then compared for frequency and commonalities to identify themes within the context of each of this study's objectives. Themes identified with each objective were:

- 1) Describe cowboy churches affiliated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches.
 - The AFCC
 - The Atmosphere
 - The Arena
 - Location Variance
- 2) Describe communication channels used by cowboy churches to diffuse information.
 - Interpersonal (Word-of-Mouth, Networking)
 - Mass Media (Website/Facebook, Text Messaging, Flyers/Posters, Local Media)
- 3) Describe the extent of cowboy church subjects awareness of Cooperative Extension.
 - Brand Awareness
 - 4-H & FFA
 - Horses

- Mission Alignment

Following the presentation of these findings, implications will be made in reference to the theoretical framework and to determine if there is indeed a potential in university-cowboy church collaborations.

Trustworthiness

As a qualitative study, the interpretations of these findings rely heavily upon how well the researcher understood the participant (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) and Dooley (2007) indicated three levels in which trustworthiness may be secured: credibility, dependability, and transferability. Steps within each of these levels were used to secure the authenticity and trustworthiness of the interpretation of this data.

Credibility refers the extent to which findings are congruent with reality (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement, and reflexivity, were four steps suggested by Merriam (2009) and Dooley (2007) to secure credibility. Triangulation, the use of multiple methods in data collection, was used when possible. Triangulation occurred through interviews, observation, and document website analysis. After each interview was transcribed, subjects were emailed a summary of findings with emerging themes, also known as member checks. Certain questions experienced saturation or recurring answers among subjects, which reflected adequate engagement. The utilization of telephone interviews is an example of reflexivity of the researcher's own biases and unchecked assumptions.

Dependability, or as described by Merriam (2009), reliability and consistency, is “the extent to which findings can be replicated” (p. 220).

Dependability is reinforced through triangulation but also secured through the use of an audit trail. An audit trail “describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 223). A data collection map and journal were kept throughout the entire research process detailing collection methods and decisions made. An audit trail was used to connect the code of each theme to its corresponding subjects and objective.

Transferability refers to the generalizability and application of findings to other situations (Merriam, 2009). Dooley (2007) stated “transferability is grounded in adequate description, thus it is imperative that the data be provided by those who know it best” (p. 39). Purposive sampling of key informants was utilized to identify subjects who know the AFCC best. Characteristics of the subjects indicated seven of them hold an administrative leadership position within the AFCC. Phone interviews reinforced transferability as it also secured maximum variation

Summary

This study followed a basic qualitative research design. A snowball sampling technique was employed to identify key informants of the AFCC. Thirteen informants were identified, and ten subjects participated in this study. All subjects were located in Texas. Data was collected over a one-month period through semi-structured, face-to-face and phone interviews. The setting of each interview varied

significantly. Data analysis identified recurring themes and patterns within the context of each of this study's objectives. Trustworthiness was secured at all three levels including credibility, dependability, and transferability.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Milly Powell, a subject in this study, asked the researcher, “Have you ever visited a cowboy church? There’s just a different spirit.” This chapter aims to capture that spirit. Recurring themes and patterns were identified within the context of each of this study’s objectives. Documents and observations were used to support these themes and patterns when applicable. An audit trail records these findings (see Appendix C). All names have been changed and identifiers removed to ensure confidentiality of subjects.

Research Objective One

The first objective of this study was to describe cowboy churches affiliated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Church (AFCC). Themes uncovered by responses revealed that the AFCC helps to resource and sustain the cowboy church movement, by providing guidance to its affiliate churches. This guidance enables churches to break down barriers, creating a come-as-you-are and non-judgmental atmosphere. The rodeo arena is used to epitomize the cowboy culture and share the Gospel, while other activities and community outreach vary by location.

The American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches

The AFCC is a non-profit organization designed “to resource and develop Cowboy Churches through enhanced training, assessment, coaching, communication, and connectedness through the movement of God’s Spirit within the Western

Culture” (AFCC, 2010). Subjects were asked a variety of questions to enable the researcher to further describe cowboy churches affiliated with the AFCC. Daniel Platt clarified that cowboy churches of the AFCC are not one-time, special event, rodeo type of churches. Instead, cowboy churches of the AFCC are part of an “organized, structured, and meet weekly cowboy church movement”. The AFCC in collaboration with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and Truett Seminary of Baylor University, provide the guidance and training to resource and support affiliate pastors and churches.

Isaac Kine enthusiastically stated, “We’re doing church in a radically different way...[the AFCC] helps me understand how cowboy church works.” Gideon Tamblyn reinforced this statement with his own, saying the AFCC “provides a model, a structure on how to set church up.” Subjects indicated that understanding the intricacies of cowboy church comes from the AFCC’s guidance through field representatives and Ranchhouse Schools.

Two of the ten subjects served as field representatives with the AFCC. According to Adam Keel, these field representatives are seasoned and experienced, they “understand the functional structure of the model and mission of cowboy church [and] what it means to really reach out to the rural, western culture with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

The AFCC also puts on Ranchhouse Schools four times a year. These schools are similar to a conference and located in different regions each time of the year to accommodate travelers. Frank Rall finds these schools as “such a useful tool in

planting a church and getting people to think differently about church and getting involved in church.” According to Adam Keel these schools, “talk about the basics of cowboy churches” through a series of small and large group sessions. Anyone interested in planting a new cowboy church, developing their skills as a church leader, or just interested in learning more about cowboy church is welcome to attend. The basics include how to be cowboy church, how to do the various types of ministries supported by cowboy churches, what to do as a beginning church, and how to establish teams to aid in church management. Milly Powell indicated these schools are maturing into more advance courses as older churches begin to take things to the next level.

The Atmosphere

Subject indicated the removal of barriers, which have been placed by traditional churches, aid in creating a come-as you-are and non-judgmental atmosphere. Breaking down barriers is recognized as an AFCC value and is often referenced in many of the church bylaws. This concept refers to any barriers that have prevented the Gospel from reaching those of the cowboy and western culture. “Sunday morning is another day where [people] still have animals to feed and crops to feed,” said Adam Keel, “Cowboy church has allowed them the opportunity to do what they feel like they need to do...and then show up to church.” Daniel Platt expressed there are external and internal barriers that prevent people from attending

church. These barriers may include but are not limited to, clothing, the building, message presentation, and the passing of the offering plate.

Jeans and t-shirts or whatever people have on before the service is considered the dress code. As for the building, Milly Powell said, “You’re not gonna find steeples on our buildings. They’re almost going to look like Tractor Supply...we just try to break down barriers so it doesn’t look like church.” Observations of church locations, where face-to-face interviews were held, reinforced this idea of cowboy churches trying not to look like traditional churches. These observations revealed concrete floors, metal structures strongly resembling barns, no pews, no hymns, interior design that exemplifies anything cowboy, and more often than not some form of rodeo arena nearby. Heath Jebson expressed that the message presentation is different in cowboy church and proclaimed, “For years church has been boring and folks don’t want church to be boring...we preach the word with boldness...” Messages are usually culturally relevant. An interview with Benjamin Richards involved first attending his service. The message was on the third commandment, which states one shall not take the Lord’s name in vain. Richards made the message culturally relevant by using a horse bit to discuss the need for controlling one’s tongue and how that bit controls the path that horse takes.

In breaking down these barriers, cowboy churches have created a come-as-you-are, non-judgmental atmosphere. Many of the subjects indicated members of their church are far from perfect. Stories of divorce, drugs and alcohol, and former prisoners permeate these congregations. Yet, cowboy church embraces the good, the

bad, and the ugly. “I think we’re the perfect church for folks that ain’t, if that makes sense,” said Ephraim Boise. According to Isaac Kine, the motto of come-as-you-are is not cliché, “It’s really what we expect them to do. We make a big deal about being real even though real isn’t always pretty.” These churches aim to create an atmosphere that reinforces what Daniel Platt described as the grace of God: “We are all in this sinking ship called life. We all fail. We all fall down...nobody is better than nobody.”

The Arena

The rodeo arena is used to epitomize the cowboy culture and considered the heartbeat of cowboy church ministry. Described as the equivalent to an inner-city church’s family life center, Adam Keel explained “the reality of it is, these guys are gonna rodeo. They’re gonna be doing it on the secular side. Why not use it as a tool in order to share the Gospel?” Isaac Kine stated, “Some cowboys and cowgirls won’t come to the service but they’ll come to the arena events.” The arena activities among churches vary. Some church communities are more oriented toward particular activities. The majority of churches are big in ranch rodeo. Ranch rodeo refers to the style of rodeo for ranch hands with events like bronc riding, mugging, branding, sorting, and wild cow milking. Seven subjects expressed ranch rodeo as one of the most attractive activities of their church. In addition to the ranch rodeo, churches tend to participate in at least one of the more traditional rodeo events such as team roping, bull riding, and barrel racing.

Overall, the arena activities are “a draw for all the community...an outreach opportunity for the whole community,” said Caleb Mattox. The AFCC believes that the arena has a significant and direct impact on baptisms. Daniel Platt expressed the overarching goal with the arena is to ride the corners:

Here’s just a ranch analogy. I call it riding the corners. A lot of times when you go to a brushy pasture, you’ll have guys that’ll assume they’ve got all the cattle. But there may be a neck in a pond, there may be a corner in a pasture with four or five cattle standing there brushed up. You need to ride the corners to make sure you clean the pasture out...by riding the corners, I mean, that in our arena events, let’s don’t assume that one or two or three activities is gonna get all the people that are connected some way to the western heritage culture. Because if we just do team ropings, we’re gonna miss a lot of the guys that are not team ropers.

As a result of riding the corners, churches attempt to provide a variety of ways in which people can get involved and spread the word of the Gospel. This occurs within the arena as well as outside it. Additional activities include chuck wagon contests, county Christian music bands, playdays for youth, trail rides, youth camps, and men’s ministry. The strengths and focus of each church vary, but as Isaac Kine said “We really try to ride the corners, to have something for everyone. We don’t want to miss anybody because we weren’t paying attention.”

Location Variance

Subjects were asked to describe the activities most common and unique to their individual churches and communities. Responses illustrated that cowboy churches share core values primarily through arena ministry; however, the cowboy culture and the communities these churches serve vary by location. Adam Keel expressed:

Some of the things that cowboy/country people do in Northeast Texas may be different than what they do in the Panhandle or in far South Texas. You know, Texas is kind of one of those states that's unique—you've got cowboys in all four corners, but they're all a little different.

Observations and subject responses confirmed all ten churches, represented in this study, are located outside city limits or on the very outskirts of town. Caleb Mattox revealed his church is “8 miles from the nearest place to buy a coke.” Four subjects specifically referenced their church as regional. Daniel Platt stated:

This is gonna sound terrible when it comes out on paper, but we have always viewed ourselves more as a cultural church...we are a regional, culturally specific church as opposed to a community-based church.

Despite rural, off-the-beaten path locations, and cultural-based perspectives, Adam Keel reinforced the church has an obligation to the community, “If our focus is inward all the time and we are just looking at what's in the church building, then we're not

fulfilling the Great Commission that Christ called us to do.” All subjects indicated responsiveness to community needs, when necessary, primarily through facility sharing, manpower, or monetary contribution.

Subjects expressed a genuine openness to share facilities particularly for special occasions like weddings, funerals, high school baccalaureates, and family reunions. Ephraim Boise and Frank Rall acknowledged their churches are the largest sit down facilities in their counties. This fact makes them both more willing to share the facilities with the county when needed. Both Boise and Rall also host predator hunts in their areas. These hunts help rid of the wild hogs, bobcats, and coyotes that bother local farmers and residents.

The area in which Frank Rall’s church is located is also infested with drugs and alcohol. As a result, the church hosts a Celebrate Recovery Program, a Christian and spiritual based 12-Step program. Rall went into detail on the significance of this program for his community.

I wasn’t aware of this before it started, but a lot of people, a condition of their parole or a condition of their release is that they attend a 12-step program. Sometimes it’s almost every night of the week that they have to go. And so we end up with people here coming and sign whatever the county/state gives them to have signed that they came.

That they attended.

Gideon Tamblyn expressed a strong involvement with his church’s surrounding community as the community really “rallies around the cowboy

culture”. The church is currently working with the Chamber of Commerce for a huge ranch rodeo event. Tamblyn said the church is also active in the Teen Life Center, which aids pregnant and suicidal teens. In addition, Tamblyn described his church as a hub of ranch volunteers.

Volunteers from the church will come work and cowboy [for local ranchers]. The church brings the chuck wagon, the rancher provides the meat. We cook and cowboy. This gives an opportunity to actually see what cowboying is really all about. The actual cowboy in church is maybe 20% or less.

Heath Jebson indicated his church was nearby some junior colleges with rodeo teams. Jebson claimed the students and rodeo teams from those colleges probably use the church’s arena more than their own. Caleb Mattox mentioned his church hosts teacher appreciation breakfasts for local schools. Three subjects also referenced to responding to the West Texas wildfires last spring by helping farmers and ranchers relocate animals and/or resource hay.

Research Objective Two

The second objective of this study was to describe the communication channels used by cowboy churches to diffuse information. A variety of methods used to share the Gospel and inform church and community members about church news, activities, and events, were described in this study. These methods were broken

down into two themes: interpersonal communication channels and mass media communication channels.

Interpersonal

Interpersonal communication channels involve face-to-face, individual, or small group interaction (Rogers, 2003). Themes of the rodeo arena, word-of-mouth, and networking illustrate forms of interpersonal communication channels used to primarily share the Gospel and exchange information.

Five subjects expressed word-of-mouth as probably the most significant form of communication that could be utilized to inform church and communities members about their activities. Adam Keel believes it's the personal relationships involved that makes word-of-mouth the best tool. Not only did subjects believe word-of-mouth was faster but it captures the excitement of the people sharing the information. It is also a part of utilizing a network.

Word-of-mouth is also part of utilizing a network. As cowboys are the target audience of the cowboy church, Heath Jebson mentioned that the cowboys at church work with other cowboys, which spreads the news about cowboy church and the message of the Gospel. The networking also exists among the churches and pastors of the AFCC. Cowboy churches will help start and sponsor other cowboy churches, come to each other's aid when needed, and the AFCC hosts inter-church activities and competitions. Two subjects believed the network of the AFCC was the most important aspect of the organization. As a new pastor, Caleb Mattox heavily relies

upon the guidance of his mentor and other pastors and stated, “The men of the AFCC make themselves readily available”. Gideon Tamblyn also uses this network, especially when dealing with issues he is unfamiliar with. “As a pastor, I can call upon other brothers...it’s a network of other cowboy preachers having dealt with this before,” said Tamblyn.

Mass Media

Mass media communication channels include any form of mass medium used to inform large audiences (Rogers, 2003). Subjects indicated utilizing the Internet, text messaging, flyers and posters, and local media, to primarily inform church and community member of news and events.

The AFCC’s home website aided in identifying church internet links. Approximately seven of the ten churches represented in this study had a functional and accessible website. When asked about communication methods, subjects of those seven churches responded to having a website. One subject indicated that a website was currently being constructed for their church. Websites were utilized by the researcher to gain perspective on each church prior to the interviews. Content on church websites consisted primarily of upcoming events, directions, bylaws, cowboy church values, and descriptions of ministries. In addition to the websites, six churches had a Facebook page. Only one subject, Ephraim Boise, expressed distaste toward Facebook:

I am opposed to facebook. I call it butt-book. That's caused more divorce than anything that I know of. We've had three families within our church where the husband or wife clicked to chat with an old high school sweetheart and two weeks later he's moving out and leaving mom and three kids behind.

Text Messaging was another theme that continued to emerge throughout the interviews. When asked about the different ways people are contacted regarding events and activities, Adam Keel stated,

You know, unfortunately, there are a couple of our pastors who think computers are a passing fad. That it's gonna go away, along with an automatic transmission. But the reality of it is, is just about everybody carries a cell phone nowadays and they get text.

One informant who was unable to participate in this study actually responded to the researcher's voice message invitation via text messaging indicating that he got the message and would think about it. The researcher then utilized text messaging to obtain written consent from all subjects who participated in phone interviews. Four subjects identified text messaging as a common form of communication, especially amongst the arena teams for scheduling practice. In addition, one website had a SMS notification sign-up for church events and activities.

Eight subjects described flyers and posters as common communication methods used to attract the community to church events and activities. Daniel Platt mentioned these posters and flyers are hung in culturally relevant locations. Such

locations include sell barns, western stores, and feed stores. Places according to Emphraim Boise, “where the cowboys hang out.”

Seven subjects indicated utilizing the local media, including radio and/or newspapers, for communicating with the public. One subject mentioned the local country music station aired the church service every week. Heath Jebson writes a weekly newspaper column for his local paper. Caleb Mattox said his church also utilized the classifieds paper, *The Thrifty Nickel* for advertising events. The AFCC also distributes a newspaper, *Cowboy Times*, every month to each church of the organization.

Research Objective Three

The third objective of this study was to describe the extent of subject awareness of Cooperative Extension. Subjects were asked three questions to ascertain their awareness of Cooperative Extension. The questions included: What is your familiarity with Cooperative Extension? Do you know your county agents? Does your church have a 4-H group? The term Cooperative Extension was used for the first few interviews and if unfamiliar with that term subjects were then probed with Texas AgriLife Extension, as all subjects were located in Texas. As the initial subjects indicated no recognition of the term Cooperative Extension, Texas AgriLife Extension was used thereafter. The themes that emerged from these questions included brand awareness, 4-H and FFA, and horses. In addition to these questions,

subjects were asked to express their willingness to collaborate with outside organizations. Willingness was dependent on the theme of mission alignment.

Brand Awareness

Four of the ten subjects of this study were unfamiliar with the brand of Texas Agrilife Extension. When probed further, two of those four subjects were aware of county agents, the third subject immediately indicated preference to work with local high school agricultural teachers, and the fourth was not aware of his county agents at all. While no church had a 4-H group, all ten subjects recognized the name of the organization.

Following these questions, subjects would often, but not always, describe the extent of their awareness or past church involvement with the agency. A couple of subjects indicated an agent actually attended their church. Three subjects have worked with agents to resource hay to farmers and ranchers suffering from the West Texas wildfires. Frank Rall was able to identify his county agents by name and stated the church has indirectly worked with the agency through a third party organization known as Community SEEDS. Phone interview subject, Gideon Tamblyn, immediately recognized the name as the researcher described the study, expressing his church has a very unique circumstance with Extension as his wife is a county agent.

4-H & FFA

The majority of discussions regarding Extension emerged after subjects were asked about 4-H. All ten subjects recognized the organization and its orientation toward youth. While no church had a 4-H group, subjects did indicate youth involvement with the organization.

Gideon Tamblyn, whose wife is a county 4-H/FCS agent, claimed his church has a unique experience with Extension. “Probably 75% of the youth is involved in 4-H because they know [my wife] here from church.” As an agent, Tamblyn’s wife will utilize the church to put on programs. Those programs are directly relevant to the church culture and include cooking classes with the chuck wagon and sewing classes using leather. “The kids just eat it up,” said Tamblyn. Another subject, Ephriam Boise, has allowed 4-H to use church facilities. Boise then mentioned that church is actually trying to set up a hunter safety course for the youth group. It was unclear if this was being arranged in collaboration with Extension or the local game warden.

Four subjects indicated a strong willingness and interest to host and/or sponsor livestock shows that would undoubtedly attract both 4-H and FFA.

When asked if the church had a 4-H group, Daniel Platt replied:

We do not have a 4-H group. We have a livestock show...we’re going to actually. We’ve been doing it outside of our church. We didn’t have wash racks, but our facility team is gonna put in wash racks this

year so we'll be able to do everything here...Of course all the FFA groups and 4-H groups will be there.

This initiative to put on livestock shows is also being considered by Isaac Kine, particularly to provide a competitive setting for kids to practice; however, Frank Rall concluded that having a covered arena makes the idea of hosting livestock shows much easier to work with.

Horses

Horses were a prominent theme that emerged in regard to potential activities cowboy churches would be willing to collaborate with an organization like Extension. The third interviewee of this study, Benjamin Richards, was unsure of the information the researcher wanted. The researcher further explained the purpose of this study and provided the example of perhaps collaborating with Extension to put on a health clinic or something of that nature. Richards responded with, "You can do clinics and different things in that nature. I wouldn't mind brining a [shot] clinic for the horses and different thinks like that." This response was then used as the example to probe information, when needed, from additional subjects. Without being probed, two subjects expressed interest in shot clinics or anything in regard to keeping posted on the rules and regulations for the horses, whether it is through Extension or some shot association.

When probed both Daniel Platt and Ephraim Boise responded with "Absolutely." Platt was exceedingly interested in the possibility. "As a matter-of-

fact,” said Platt, “the horsemanship clinic that you guys offer, I hope that we can host that here next year.” Boise expressed that the culture of cowboy church is indeed a culture that is compatible to Extension programs. “From show animals to training horse, plant ID to pasture management. That’s who are people are,” said Boise.

Mission Alignment

When asked about sharing facilities or collaborating with outside organizations, all subjects expressed willingness and openness to the idea; however, the criterion of that willingness was completely based upon mission alignment.

Adam Keel expressed:

We’re not going to let someone come in that has complete disrespect or disregard for the mission of what God’s called us to do. They have to be a little accepting of what God’s called us to do. It doesn’t mean that we’re trying to sway their beliefs or trying to influence them to believe like we believe. Its just we don’t want to be in a battle type situation.

Subjects described a variety measures used in determining mission alignment. Ephraim Boise and Isaac Kine have specific questions they ask themselves. Boise makes sure that any activity supported by his church is reaching lost people, is within the budget, and is within the church bylaws and constitution. Kine tries to identify connections the activity has to the Christian culture, to

agriculture, and to family. Daniel Platt articulated that mission alignment is about culturally relevancy and the freedom to preach:

We're not opposed to outside groups, as long as they're culturally relevant and we have an opportunity to preach. The thing is, the outside group wouldn't have to do the preaching. You come in. You do your deal and we'll do ours. And we'll host. I don't know if you've been to our arena but we're spoiled rotten. Our guys built a heck of a pen."

According to Frank Rall the freedom to preach is as simple as being "able to open with a prayer and, at some point in time, to present a 5-10 minute message." While Benjamin Richard's church is not necessarily open for many partnerships outside the church, he recommends coming by to talk to him anyway. If information needs go out to the public, Richards is willing to "find a way to tie it into the message."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a descriptive report on cowboy churches while identifying the potential, or acceptability, for university-cowboy church collaborations. The significance of this study directly responds to the Kellogg Commission (1999) charge for universities to become more engaged with communities. Three objectives guided this study and were achieved upon its completion:

- 1) Describe cowboy churches affiliated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches
- 2) Describe communications channels used by cowboy churches to diffuse information.
- 3) Describe the extent of subject awareness of Cooperative Extension.

These three objectives enabled the researcher to describe cowboy churches, while Rogers' (2003) *Diffusion of Innovations* was employed to evaluate the potential of university-cowboy church collaborations. This evaluation is found within the implications section of this chapter.

This basic, qualitative study utilized a purposive, snowball sampling technique. Key informants from the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches (AFCC) were snowballed using a top-down approach. Thirteen informants were contacted and a total of ten subjects participated in this study. Semi-structured, face-

to-face and phone interviews were conducted with these subjects. Data were analyzed for common themes and patterns within the context of each of this study's objectives. Three levels of trustworthiness were secured through multiple methods including triangulation, member checks, reflexivity, and an audit trail.

Conclusions

A variety of themes emerged to describe cowboy churches affiliated with the AFCC, the communication channels these churches utilize, and the extent of subject awareness of the land-grant entity, Texas AgriLife Extension. These findings are outlined in an audit trail (See Appendix C). From these findings various conclusions can be made about the AFCC, the churches of this study, and the potential for community collaborations.

Cowboy churches affiliated with the AFCC are part of a structured and organized movement. The AFCC provides the resources, training, and networking to establish and develop cowboy churches. Breaking down barriers created by traditional churches has created a non-judgmental, come-as-you-are atmosphere for these cowboy churches. Common values and attributes are shared; yet each church varies by location. The rodeo is considered the cowboy church's greatest strength and outreach. Subjects implied congregants have an underlying connection to agriculture; however, the extent of this connection was not investigated. Culturally relevancy is a determinant of what occurs within the churches and in context of community engagement. Not all cowboy churches of this study openly seek

community collaborations; however, those that do require the collaboration be culturally relevant and pastors expressed that they reserve the right to openly share the Gospel.

Implications

Implications from this study suggest university-cowboy church collaborations are an acceptable innovation, especially in the context of Extension collaborations. Rogers' (2003) five perceived attributes of an innovation are used in this section to discuss the acceptability of university-cowboy church collaborations. Implications are also interpreted regarding Extension Awareness and communicating with cowboy churches. Interpretations are reinforced through connections to the theoretical framework and research described in the literature review, when applicable.

Subject awareness of Extension implies a lack of connection to the brand identity of Texas Agrilife Extension. Only one subject was unaware of his county agent and all subjects recognized the organization 4-H; however, it was unclear if subjects understood the connection of the county agents or 4-H to the agency. Recent name changes of the Texas Cooperative Extension Service may have caused some unfamiliarity. It can also be concluded that Extension does not currently, or commonly, seek out these churches for collaborative purposes.

University-cowboy church collaborations have advantages to both Cooperative Extension and cowboy churches. Relative advantage is the degree to

which an idea is perceived as more advantageous than previous ideas (Rogers, 2003). Rogers (2003) described relative advantage in terms of profitability and cost/benefit analysis (Rogers, 2003). Cooperative Extension is a land-grant agency already positioned to engage communities (Kelsey, 2002; Lerner & Simon, 1998; McDowell, 2004; Rasmussen, 1989). Extension is currently criticized for not expanding their clientele beyond the realm of agriculture (McDowell, 2004; West, Drake, and Lando, 2009); however, research also suggests the agricultural clientele reinforces the strengths of many county agents (Telg, et al., 2007). Findings from this study conclude that cowboy churches are tied to agriculture and prefer to use word-of-mouth and websites for communication, a similar attribute to Extension agent preferences (Telg, et al., 2007). Emphraim Boise even stated Extension programs were oriented toward the people in his church. The overall benefit for Extension to collaborate with cowboy churches is that it would allow for Extension to reach a new audience, while still maximizing their strengths and maintaining that connection to an agriculturally oriented culture. Collaborations with outside organizations, like Extension, may socially benefit cowboy churches by providing them with research-based information but also providing an additional outlet in which new audiences are attracted and reached through the Gospel.

Rogers (2003) described compatibility as the consistency of an innovation to existing values, experiences, and needs of potential adopters. Compatibility helps to dispel uncertainty of an innovation. Subjects of this study expressed a strong need for mission alignment in order to collaborate with outside organizations. Sharing of

facilities and partnerships with cowboy churches require respect for their mission and the freedom and/or flexibility for churches to share their beliefs. Research on university collaborations with black churches expressed this same need for mission alignment, mutual respect, and a level of governance over the partnership (Corbie-Smith, et al., 2010; Goldman & Roberson, 2004). Subjects also indicated more favorable interest in collaborations relevant to the cowboy culture. As already discussed within the context of relative advantage, Extension has programming relevant to the culture. The mission of Extension, which is to diffuse unbiased, practical, research-based information pertaining to agriculture, family sciences, youth development, and related fields, is compatible to the audience structure of cowboys, families, and youth, within cowboy churches (Graham, 1994; Rasmussen, 1989).

Complexity refers to an innovation's degree of difficulty (Rogers, 2003). Innovations with high complexity experience various barriers, which impede adoption rates. The infrastructure for collaborations, depending on location, is already in place, as Extension has a presence in virtually every county (Graham, 1994; Rasmussen, 1989); however, cowboy churches have yet to infiltrate every county. As a result, there is no systematic way to communicate with these churches. Issues of complexity will primarily be dependent on attributes of agents and church leaders, as well as content. Rogers (2003) indicated more effective communication occurs between individuals who share similar attributes. Cowboy churches are also specifically designed to break down barriers that impeded the sharing of the Gospel.

This ideology of breaking down barriers implies a strong sense of simplicity among churches. If collaborations involve development of skills and knowledge beyond the cowboy church comfort zone, the less likely it will be adopted (Rogers, 2003).

Agents and content of Extension programming and information must be culturally relevant, connecting to the cowboy and western heritage culture.

The extent to which an innovation can be experimented and tried reflects its trialability (Rogers, 2003). Responses directly related to objective 3, subject awareness of Cooperative Extension, imply multiple ways in which collaborations could potentially exist. Gideon Tambllyn expressed his church has a unique relationship with Extension since his wife is a county agent. His experience with Extension implies programming can be adapted to fit the culture, such as nutrition and cooking classes with the chuck wagon ministries. Recent wildfires have caused some subjects to communicate with Extension in order to relocate and resource hay, implying a church role and responsibility in emergency response. Ephraim Boise indicated his youth could benefit from a hunter safety course while others described preparations to put on livestock shows. Programming involving horses is also a potential start to collaborations as subjects expressed interest in horse health and one particular subject was interested in hosting his county Extension's horsemanship clinic. Each of these instances provided insight and examples for initiating and experimenting with collaborations.

Observability, or the visible results of an innovation, were not apparent through this study and could not be evaluated (Rogers, 2003).

Recommendations

It is recommended that Extension professionals identify and initiate contact with the cowboy churches in their counties, when applicable. Cowboy churches value interpersonal relationships, and it is critical that a relationship or familiarity with each other be built before any type of diffusion. Pastors, a leadership position allocated to men, should be contacted first regarding interest in collaborations as they serve as gatekeepers, controlling the flow of information through the church (Rogers, 2003). Once communication is initiated and familiarity of both institutions are developed, Extension programming should be administered regarding nutrition through chuck wagons, livestock shows, horse health and horsemanship, and youth.

Recommendations for practice also extend beyond Extension. Rodeo competitions are a popular attraction among cowboy churches. One subject indicated sharing church facilities with local junior college rodeo teams for fun and practice. As the arena is used to advertise the cowboy church, it could also potentially be used to advertise and recruit for colleges and universities. It is recommended that college rodeo and equestrian teams look into collaborating with cowboy churches to host activities, camps, events, or something of similar nature. Exposure to college rodeo and equestrian student-athletes could potentially facilitate college interest among families and youth.

There is still much to be learned from cowboy churches and their relevance to the land-grant institution and colleges of agriculture. Qualitative research is conducive to the interpersonal nature of these churches. Case studies and participant

observation are recommended designs for future studies. A case study approach, operationalizing each of Rogers' (2003) five perceived attributes would allow for a specific collaboration, especially one recommended for future practice, to be investigated. Research involving survey or requiring email response is not suggested; however, surveys could be employed through phone interviews.

This study provided limited insight to the people of cowboy churches. Research should investigate and better understand the congregation, their professions, and their direct connections to agriculture. Cowboy churches also have a unique approach to how they advertise and market their churches and activities. Further research should investigate the effectiveness of these strategies and their application to other areas related to agriculture. Finally, research should also be conducted to triangulate extension-cowboy church collaborations and ascertain both parties' awareness and involvement with each other.

Limitations from this study make it difficult to generalize beyond Texas, the AFCC, and the churches affiliated with each subject; however, Simon (2010) expressed "knowledge gained in one setting should be widely disseminated to advance the public good in other places" (p. 46). This study provided context for a new territory to be explored, of an untapped population for research, dissemination of information, student recruitment, and community development, and a social system which may facilitate decision-making and adoption practices.

The conclusions and implications of this study suggest university-cowboy church collaborations are an acceptable innovation, especially in the context of

Extension collaborations. There are relative advantages for such collaborations, shared compatibility through each institution's mission, and ample opportunities for trialability.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
DIVISION OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES - OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE**

1186 TAMU, General Services Complex
College Station, TX 77843-1186
750 Agronomy Road, #3500

979.458.1467
FAX 979.862.3176
<http://researchcompliance.tamu.edu>

Human Subjects Protection Program

Institutional Review Board

APPROVAL DATE: 14-Jul-2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: WILLIAMS, KATY F
77843-1116

FROM: Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Initial Review

Protocol Number: 2011-0422

Title: The Land Grant Mission & The Cowboy Church

Review Category: Expedited

Approval Period: 14-Jul-2011 To 13-Jul-2012

Approval determination was based on the following Code of Federal Regulations:

45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) - Some or all of the research appearing on the list and found by the reviewer(s) to involve no more than minimal risk.

Criteria for Approval has been met (45 CFR 46.111) - The criteria for approval listed in 45 CFR 46.111 have been met (or if previously met, have not changed).

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation or quality assurance methodologies.

(Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b) (3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Provisions:

Comments:

This research project has been approved for one (1) year. As principal investigator, you assume the following responsibilities

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed each year in order to continue with the research project. A Continuing Review along with required documents must be submitted 30 days before the end of the approval period. Failure to do so may result in processing delays and/or non-renewal.
2. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted to the IRB Office.
3. **Adverse Events:** Adverse events must be reported to the IRB Office immediately.
4. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment to the IRB Office for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
5. **Informed Consent:** Information must be presented to enable persons to voluntarily decide whether or not to participate in the research project.

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS

Telephone Script

Hi! My name is Katy Williams. I am a Master's student from the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at Texas A&M University. I am actually doing my thesis on Cowboy Churches. The purpose of my study is to explore and investigate how cowboy churches may help aid land-grant institutions in the dissemination and diffusion of information and ideas related to agriculture and family and consumer sciences. I wanted to invite you to participate in my research. It will require a face-to-face interview. Once we can arrange a time and date, I will come by the church and ask you some questions about cowboy churches. It shouldn't take any more than hour of your time. There are no risks or benefits in your participation. I am just asking for you to share with me some of your experiences and your expertise about cowboy churches.

Would you like to participate?

- Yes... Can you meet on any of following dates: ????. If something comes up and we need to reschedule please give me a call at 903-348-5889. Are there any other ministers, former ministers, or secretaries, you can recommend as having considerable knowledge and expertise about cowboy churches that I could contact to invite to participate? Thank you so much for your time. I look forward to our interview.

- No... Are there any other ministers, former ministers, or secretaries, you can recommend as having considerable knowledge and expertise about cowboy churches that I could contact to invite to participate? Thank you for your time and consideration.

Information & Consent Form: The Land-Grant Mission & The Cowboy Church

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used as record of your consent. You have been asked to participate in a research project pertaining to my master's thesis from the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communications at Texas A&M University. The purpose of this study is to explore how land-grant institutions may disseminate information and ideas related to agriculture, family, youth, and health to cowboy churches. You were selected to be a possible participant because some of your peers affiliated with the American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches recommended you for interview.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an interview and answer questions pertaining to the cowboy church mission, recruitment and retention of members, activities, communication, and interaction with the community. This study will take approximately 30-60 minutes to complete. Your participation may be audio recorded.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY?

The risks associated in this study are minimal and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, you or the AFCC may find useful information from the reported findings.

DO I HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

No. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty.

WHO WILL KNOW ABOUT MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?

This study is confidential. All names and identifiers to your person and affiliate church will be removed from any data or report that my result from this study. Information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law. If you chose to be audio recorded, recordings will be kept for approximately 2 months and then erased.

WHOM DO I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH?

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact:

Katy Williams

cell: 903-348-5889 email:

kfranwilliams@gmail.com

WHOM DO I CONTACT ABOUT MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

This research study has been reviewed by the humans Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu

**Information & Consent Form:
The Land-Grant Mission & The Cowboy Church**

SIGNATURE

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions, and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form your records. By signing this document you consent to participate in this study.

**Please Indicate your willingness to be audio recorded:*

_____ Yes, I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ No, I do not want to be audio recorded.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Interview Guide

1. THE MISSION & THE PEOPLE

- The mission statement online states the AFCC “is organized to resource and develop cowboy churches through enhanced training, assessment, coaching, communication, and connectedness through the movement of God’s Spirit within the Western Culture.” Could you explain in more detail how the AFCC does these things?
- What is the target population of cowboy church?

2. RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

- What do you think it is about this church (or cowboy church in general) that makes people want to come?
- What are some of the strategies used to recruit and retain members?

3. ACTIVITIES

- What type of activities and ministries does the church provide?
- Are these common throughout all cowboy churches or unique to your church?
- Could you describe some of the most popular activities/missions?
 - o Who participates in them?
 - o When and where do they take place?

4. COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY

- What are some of the different ways people are contacted and informed about church news and events?
- What kinds of media and technology do you use in church?
- How do you advertise your church, upcoming events and activities to the community?

5. COMMUNITY

- What do you feel the role of this church is in the context of the surrounding community?
- Have local groups, societies, agencies, clubs, or organizations ever approached you or this church about using the facilities, or partnering for an event or anything?
 - o If yes, what kind?
 - o If no, how would an organization need to approach you about doing this?
 - o Are there any criteria that determine your willingness to partner with and collaborate with other organizations?

6. EXTENSION

- What is your familiarity with Cooperative Extension?
 - o Do you know any of the county agents: ag, FCS, youth agent
 - o Does your church have a 4-H group?

Was there anything else you would like to discuss?

APPENDIX C

AUDIT TRAIL & SUBJECT PSEUDONYMS

AUDIT TRAIL

OBJECTIVE 1: Describe cowboy churches affiliated with AFCC.

The AFCC	S1, S2, S4, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, D1, D4, D11, D12, D13, O5, O10
The Atmosphere	S1, S2, S3, S5, S6, S7, S8, S10, D2, D3, D5, D6, D12, O1, O2, O3, O5, O6, O7
The Arena	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D7, D5, D6, D10, D11, D13, O3, O5, O7
Location Variance	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, O1, O2, O3, O5, O6, O7,

OBJECTIVE 2: Describe the communication channels used by cowboy church to diffuse information.

Interpersonal	
Word-of-Mouth	S1, S2, S5, S9, S10
Networking	S1, S2, S4, S5, S7, S8, D1, D11, D13, O11
Mass Media	
Website/Facebook	S1, S2, S3, S4, S6, S7, S8, S9, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, D10
Text Messaging	S2, S3, S7, S8, O4, O8, O9, O10
Flyers/Posters	S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S9, S10
Local Media	S1, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10

OBJECTIVE 3: Describe the extent of subject awareness of Cooperative Extension.

Brand Awareness	S1, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S10
4-H & FFA	S1, S4, S5, S6, S10
Horses	S3, S5, S7, S8, S9, S10
Mission Alignment	S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S10

S= Subject O= Observation D= Document/Website

Note: Numbers correspond to each subject. Additional documents were used that did not correspond with a specific subject or church, thus numbers extended beyond "10"

Subject Pseudonyms

<i>Subject 1</i>	Milly Powell
<i>Subject 2</i>	Adam Keel
<i>Subject 3</i>	Benjamin Richards
<i>Subject 4</i>	Caleb Mattox
<i>Subject 5</i>	Daniel Platt
<i>Subject 6</i>	Ephraim Boise
<i>Subject 7</i>	Frank Rall
<i>Subject 8</i>	Gideon Tamblyn
<i>Subject 9</i>	Heath Jebson
<i>Subject 10</i>	Isaac Kine

VITA

Name: Katy Frances Williams

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Education:

Master of Science, Texas A&M University, December 2011
Major: Agricultural Leadership, Education, & Communication

Bachelor of Arts, Austin College (Sherman, TX), May 2010
Major: Sociology Minor: Educational Psychology