

**COLLEGE STUDENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN ADVOCACY: ENGAGING
MILLENNIALS**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

SHILOH PERRY

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Approved by
Research Advisor:

Dr. Billy R. McKim

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ABSTRACT

College students' involvement in advocacy: Engaging Millennials. (May 2014)

Shiloh Perry

Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications
Texas A&M University

Research Advisor: Dr. Billy R. McKim

Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influences of Millennial involvement in student advocacy. Some trends that show what it takes to keep Millennials involved have been found, but exactly what engages them in advocacy is not known. For this study we will interview college students involved in student advocacy, specifically student leaders involved in agriculture-related advocacy organizations. The interviews will lead to potential factors that motivate students to become involved and stay involved in student advocacy. Explanations of why other generations (Baby Boomers and Generation X) participated in student advocacy are relatively clear (Van Dyke, 1998). However, there is not a clear understanding of how Millennial college students engage in student advocacy. The Millennial generation is known to be more confident, conventional, and team-oriented than other generations. Millennials are future oriented, more tradition learners compared to Generation X, and like working with others (Lowery, 2004). Despite a great deal of literature about the unique characteristic of the Millennial generation, there is nothing that shows the relationship between the generation's uniqueness and their involvement in student advocacy.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my research to my parents and close friends. They have supported me throughout this entire research process. I appreciate their influence and cherish my relationships with each of them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my research advisor, Dr. Billy McKim, for his tremendous support. With his guidance I became involved in the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program. The program has been very beneficial to me. His teachings have helped me develop an extensive knowledge of the qualitative research. Without his direction and encouragement, this project could not have been accomplished. I am grateful for his contribution.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary focuses of higher education is to prepare students for civic participation in the democracy of the United States. A democracy encourages its citizens to influence society through voting and other means.

Education for democratic citizenship focuses on enabling students' participation in the democratic process of "conscious social reproduction," but this does not mean that students learn only to identify a preference, cast a ballot, and yeas and nays. To insure fairness and continuity of democracy, democratic principles as well as processes must be safeguarded (Hamrick, 1998, p. 451).

One of the principles of democracy that must be safe guarded is nondiscrimination. The principle of nondiscrimination can be protected by student involvement in advocacy efforts (Hamrick, 1998).

College campuses are progressively becoming more diverse culturally, racially, and socioeconomically. Student diversity is related to students voicing opinions about fairness for underrepresented groups and populations. Students standing up for fairness suggest that they are committed to the common good of society. Students can learn about and come to appreciate the complexity of civic responsibility through both academic and practical application. Academic application includes activities such as involvement in institutional governance and practical application includes involvement in community service projects (Hamrick, 1998). Other factors

that may influence the voice of the student body are the characteristics of the students' generation, such as millennial confidence and achievement (Lowery, 2004).

The Millennial generation was born in 1979-2000 (Sweeny, 2005), and has been suggested to be more conventional and confident than other generations. Millennial college students have confidence in their technologic expertise, which is proficient beyond their parents, professors, and future employers. Millennials are seen as non-traditional learners in comparison to Generation X (Lowery, 2004). Millennials look toward the future and are sure in their ability to be the next generation. Also Millennial college student are team-oriented; they like to work with others, which make them intensively involved in community service. Their team oriented nature makes them most comfortable in group settings and group work because it reduces individual failure. The Millennial generation has distinct characteristics that may influence student advocacy today (Lowery, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influences of Millennial involvement in student advocacy. To understand the influences of Millennials in student advocacy, we looked specifically at Millennial college students involved in university-based agriculture advocacy efforts. These millennial college students were born in 1989-1996 and were classified as undergraduate and graduate students. Trends show what it takes to keep Millennial college students involved have been found from the distinct characteristics of their generation, but exactly what engages them in activism is unknown. Explanations of why other generations (Baby

Boomers and Generation X) participated in student activism are relatively clear (Van Dyke, 1998). However, there is not a clear understanding of how Millennials engage in student advocacy. It is important to understand why and how Millennials engage in student activism or advocacy because “student activism challenges and publically questions the genuineness of higher education. Student efforts empower citizenship and serve to marginalize student citizens” (Hamrick, 1998, p. 451).

Advocacy and Activism are often used as synonyms; however, each has a unique definition and purpose. Advocacy is commonly defined as “actively supporting a cause or the acts of pleading or arguing in favor of something” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2007, p. 14). Similarly, activism is defined as “the theory or practice of aggressive action in support of or in opposition of a cause” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2007, p. 14). Reviewing the literature about both college student advocacy and activism will help us understand and describe the potential factors that motivate college students to become involved in student advocacy.

Activism is based on history. Student activism is reported to have begun in the 1930s as a form of student protest. College campuses where student protests occurred in the 1930s were more likely to host student protests in the 1960s. “Activist subcultures may have endured on college campuses over many generations” (Van Dyke, 1998, pg. 205). The symbols, ideologies, and opinions of past activist groups were kept alive in certain settings, like book stores and coffee

shops, at the universities affiliated with advocacy efforts. Past advocacy groups provided continuity for future advocacy groups (Van Dyke, 1998).

During the 1960s and 1970s, student activism was likely to take place on elite college campuses. Elite college campuses had access to the resources necessary for advocacy to occur. The students of elite colleges had help funding their academic pursuits so they had time to participate in advocacy organizations and could supply the resources necessary to enhance the organization's efforts. They did not have to be employed while in school to pay their tuition and living expenses (Van Dyke, 1998).

Activism or advocacy efforts on college campuses were influenced by the institution size and faculty influence. "Students at larger universities may become lost and isolated due to the large number of students and lack of interaction with faculty and may therefore become interested in protest activity" (Van Dyke, 1998, p. 206). The faculty may encourage students to become involved in activism or advocacy efforts. Also, at the time, activists did not know that in some cases, standing up for what they did or did not believe in would later be considered a major movement (Van Dyke, 1998).

Some trends that show what it takes to keep Millennials involved have been found, but exactly what engages them in activism is not known (Lowery, 2004). For this study we interviewed

college students involved in student activism, specifically student leaders involved in agriculture-related activist and advocacy organizations. The student leaders were involved in the day to day operations of their advocacy organizations. They facilitated their organization's meetings, looked over their organization's finances, planned and participated in events, and believed in their organization's overall goal. The interviews were conversational in nature and the interview questions were guided by topics. The questions topic include the student's background (i.e. university they attend, field of study, future plans) involvement in extracurricular activities (i.e. likes and dislikes of their involvement), and interest in agriculture advocacy. The interviews led to potential factors that motivate students to become involved and stay involved in student advocacy. The interviews also helped us find out exactly how Millennial college students engage in student advocacy efforts.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research about the reasons why Baby Boomers and Generation X participated in student advocacy efforts has been relatively clear, focusing on the resources college campuses have provided. In the 1960s and 1970s student activism was likely to take place on elite college campuses, because elite college campuses had access to the resources necessary for advocacy to occur (Van Dyke, 1998). Additionally, students of elite colleges had help funding their academic pursuits so they had time to participate in advocacy organizations and could supply the resources necessary to enhance the organization's efforts. They did not have to be employed while in school to pay their tuition and living expenses (Van Dyke, 1998). However, there is not a clear understanding of how and why the Millennial generation participates in student advocacy. Only studies based on the political engagement of Millennial college students were found.

In a study about the political engagement of millennial college students, conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Kiesa et al. (2007) reported that Millennials were more politically engaged than Generation X while in college. Also Millennial college students were more concerned with political engagement locally than on the national level (Kiesa et al., 2007). Factors that influenced millennial involvement in political engagement do not directly influence millennial involvement in student advocacy. Advocacy is commonly defined as “actively supporting a cause or the acts of pleading or arguing in favor of something” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2007, p. 14). Political engagement involves keeping

up with politics on news media or by other means, while actively discussing political information (Galston, 2001). Factors that influence the political engagement of millennial college students cannot be used to explain the influences of millennial college students' advocacy efforts but may be related. Also, despite the great deal of literature about the unique characteristics of the millennial generation, there is nothing that shows the relationship between the generation's uniqueness and its involvement in student advocacy.

This study used a naturalistic design while drawing on theory a priori. We relied on Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) for our initial theoretical guidance to better understand why and how Millennials engage in student advocacy. Although it is uncommon for qualitative studies to use theory a priori, it is not always inappropriate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using theory a priori was appropriate in this case because several studies have noted the utility of social cognitive theory in situational research (i.e., dividing a situation into manageable components; personal, environmental, and behavioral; Wood & Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 2001a; Bandura, 2001b; Pajaras et al., 2009). Because we investigated student activism in a specific context and situation, drawing on SCT enabled us to divide the situation into more manageable parts; thereby, enabling us to gain a greater level of understanding.

According to Bandura (2001):

To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one's actions. Agency embodies the endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and

functions through which personal influence exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place. The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times (p. 2).

Drawing on the guidance provided by SCT as explained by Bandura (2001b), an individual's way of thinking influences or directs his or her actions; therefore, understanding how and why Millennial college students' engage in student advocacy may be explained by exploring the three components of SCT: Personal determinants, environmental determinants, and behavioral determinants. Further, social cognitive theory emphasizes the importance of symbolization, self-regulation, and vicarious capabilities.

The determinants of SCT are equally dependent on one another, assuming a triadic reciprocal causation model (Bandura, 2001b, p. 267). For example, an individual's personal characteristics and environment may be used to help explain their behavior. Thus, a college student's personal characteristics and environment are used to explain why they behave a certain way, why they engage in student advocacy. Together the three primary determinants of social cognitive theory may help explain why students take action in certain situations.

Personal Determinants

The personal determinants of SCT can be described as characteristics that make a certain person unique. Personal determinants include biological factors as well as a person's cultural influence. A person's culture is an important personal determinant because it creates norms for that person

to live by and act on. For example, personal determinates include a millennial college student's background, lifestyle, values, beliefs, and passions. For this study, we explored personal determinants that may have influenced Millennials' involvement in student advocacy, including the unique characteristics of the millennial generation.

Research has demonstrated various characteristics that make the Millennial generation unique.

The Millennial student is the largest and most diverse generation to ever attend college. They are unlike their predecessors who attended college ten, fifteen or twenty years ago. Their collective personality, thought process, and educational tendencies are unique to traditional classroom practices and educational environments (Monaco and Martin, 2007, p. 42).

The millennial generation has been suggested to be more confident than other generations. Millennials are more confident in their ability to be the greatest generation, unlike Generation X. "Millennials look toward the future longingly, confident in the knowledge that they have the capacity to be the next generation" (Lowery, 2004, p. 90). Millennials are also confident because of their technological knowledge. Millennial college students have cutting edge technology and their expertise is beyond that of other generations. Millennials' confidence is also contributes to their ability to achieve their goals (Lowery, 2004).

Along with being confident, Millennials are team oriented. Millennials prefer to work in teams (Jonas-Dwyer & Pospisil, 2004). "Unlike the individualistic orientation of Generation X, the

Millennials evidence a strong team orientation, which has been reinforced by parents and in schools throughout their lives” (Lowery, 2004, p. 91). Millennial are more comfortable working with others. Millennial attraction to group work allows them to cooperate with others and reduces the risk of failing on their own (Lowery, 2004).

Environmental Determinants

The environmental determinants of SCT can be explained by the physical and social setting an individual is involved in. A student’s social setting is any external interaction they have in a certain context. This physical and social setting can change based on the situation. Small, large, or even drastic, changes in a student’s environment (physical or social setting) can lead their behavior to change (Bandura, 2001b). Environmental determinants of college students may be the amount of structure they had growing up and the freedom they have at their university. Further, a college student’s environment also includes the culture of student advocacy on campus.

Millennial college students are family oriented, having a close relationship to their parents. Their close relationship with the parents, their environment, makes them feel special and gives them great confidence (Monaco & Martin, 2007). Being encouraged by their parents has been suggested to lead them work hard to be successful, taking advantage of opportunities to give back. “They have engaged in numerous academic, extracurricular and service pursuits; in helping others and addressing social problems” (Elm et al., 2007, p. 22). Millennials were taught to be generous (Elm et al., 2007). Having a close relationship with their parents, Millennials

were sheltered while growing up. Parents of Millennials focused on scheduled lifestyles through engagement of extracurricular activities (Monaco and Martin, 2007, p. 42). Lowery (2004) described Millennials as “the focus of the most sweeping youth safety movement in American history” (p. 89). Millennial college students showed concern over campus crime and student conduct.

Student activism is reported to have begun in 1930s as a form of student protest. College campuses where student protest occurred in the 1930s were more likely to host student protests in the 1960s. “Activist subcultures may have endured on college campuses over many generations” (Van Dyke, 1998, p. 227). The symbols, ideologies, and opinions of past activist groups were kept alive in certain setting like book stores and coffee shops at the universities affiliated with advocacy efforts. Past advocacy groups provided continuity for future advocacy groups (Van Dyke, 1998).

Activism or advocacy efforts on college campuses was influenced by institution size and faculty influence. “Students at larger universities may become lost and isolated due to the large number of students and lack of interaction with faculty and may therefore become interested in protest activity” (Van Dyke, 1998, p. 206). Faculty may encourage students to become involved in activism or advocacy efforts. Also, at the time, activists did not know that in some cases, standing up for what they did or did not believe in would later be considered a major movement (Van Dyke, 1998).

Behavioral Determinants

The behavioral characteristics of SCT include the social and physical aspects of a person's life that affect the way he or she acts (Bandura, 2001b, p. 266). As noted, the triadic reciprocal relationship among the determinants allows us to assume certain social and physical factors (environmental determinants) may cause college students to behave differently in one situation compared to another. Students may speak up about a controversial issue, a part of their student organization, with their friends by their side. Conversely, students may not engage in controversial advocacy conversations when they are around a group of people they do not know. The interaction between people and their environment is affected by their thoughts and actions.

The triadic reciprocal causation of Social Cognitive Theory will help us better understand the behavioral characteristics of millennial college students, what engages millennial college students in activism efforts. By understanding the personal and environment determinates of millennial college students involved in student advocacy and how each of these determinants affect each other, we will gain insight about the behavioral determinates or the potential factors that engage college students in advocacy efforts. Specifically for this project, the personal determinants of millennial college students involved in advocacy are the characteristics that make them a unique generation and the environmental determinates of millennial student advocacy are the characteristics of the universities the Millennials attend and any other environments they are a part of. The behavioral determinates of millennial student advocacy are what factors we find to influence their involvement in student advocacy efforts.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand what engages Millennials in advocacy efforts by interpreting the motivation and intentions of college students involved. According to Bryman (2012), “qualitative research tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers” (p. 388). For the purposes of this study, qualitative research was concerned with the words of college students, more specifically with how these students use their words to describe their passions and their involvement in activism efforts. Qualitative research allowed us to interpret the meaning of the student’s involvement by the specific words, sentences, and phrases used to describe it.

As a case study, this study investigated a contemporary phenomenon. Yin (2014) explained a case study “is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real world context” (p. 16). This study investigated the contemporary phenomenon of how college students became and stayed engaged in student advocacy efforts. We investigated this phenomenon by trying to understand how college students from different universities describe their extracurricular involvement and advocacy efforts.

The process of how theory is developed is important because the process of theory development guides the researcher through the entire research project, specifically data collection. Theory

development is approached in two ways, deductively and inductively. Research is approached deductively when theory guides the research process and data collection, and inductively, when theory or ideas based from theory come from the research process. (Yin, 2014) This study was approached inductively. According to Bryman (2012), research is inductive if its ideas are derived from data that are collected. This study's ideas come from its findings, as a result of data that were collected and analyzed. "Most qualitative researchers when writing about their craft emphasize a reference for treating theory as something that emerges out of the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2012, p. 388). In this study, ideas emerged from data that were collected. With ideas as the results of research, this qualitative study was conducted inductively (Bryman, 2012).

This study used a naturalistic design while drawing on theory a priori. We relied on Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) for our initial theoretical guidance to better understand why and how Millennials engage in student advocacy. Although it is uncommon for qualitative studies to use theory a priori, it is not always inappropriate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using theory a priori was appropriate in this case because several studies have noted the utility of social cognitive theory in situational research (i.e., dividing a situation into manageable components; personal, environmental, and behavioral; Wood & Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 2001a; Bandura, 2001b; Pajeras et al., 2009). Because we investigated student activism in a specific context and situation, drawing on SCT enabled us to divide the situation into more manageable parts; thereby, enabling us to gain a greater level of understanding.

Bandura's social cognitive theory is based on three main determinants: personal characteristics, environmental factors, and behavior factors. Each of the determinants of SCT are equally dependent on one another, assuming a triadic reciprocal causation model (Mass Comm. Bandura, 2001, p. 267). Bandura's social cognitive theory helped us understand why college students engage in student activism based on what they value or believe in, the culture of the university they attend, and the social and physical aspects of their life. Along with social cognitive theory, this study used individual theories that focused on cognitive development and decision making.

The purpose of this case study was to describe the influences of Millennial college students' involvement in advocacy efforts. To understand the influences of Millennial college students' advocacy efforts, we looked specifically at Millennial college students involved in university-based agriculture advocacy efforts. The Millennial generation also known as GenY, Echo Boomers, C Generation, M Generation, and NextGen was born in 1979 through 2000 (Sweeney, 2005, p.166). For this study the populations inferred were Millennial college students involved in advocacy efforts across the United States. For our purpose, agriculture advocacy efforts include any events or conferences students participate in to promote agriculture positively. We looked specifically at Millennial born in 1996 through 1889 who attended college at a four year university, classified as undergraduate and graduate students. Our participants were both male and female.

To seek participants particularly interested or involved in agriculture advocacy, we made connections with the delegates of a conference hosted by Texas A&M University's Farmers

Fight organization, an extracurricular student agriculture advocacy organization. Texas A&M University's Farmers Fight organization began in January 2012, when students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences responded to news articles that portrayed agriculture negatively. Focused on training agriculture advocates, community outreach, and connecting with Texas A&M's campus, Farmers Fight hosted the inaugural National Agriculture Advocacy Conference to help student leaders from across the nation spread a positive light on agriculture through advocacy efforts

We first made contact with the study's participants at the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference in College Station, Texas, on October 4-6, 2013. The conference brought together active student leaders, from across the country, who were motivated to advocate the importance of agriculture. The participants were college students, undergraduate and graduate students, involved in extracurricular organization and agriculture advocacy efforts at their universities. The conference allowed the students to engage in dialogue with field experts, learn from featured speakers, and connect with other participants. The conference focused on how to have more productive advocacy efforts by engaging in active dialogues.

According to Yin (2014), research interviews have two main purposes in a case study: First, research interviews have to follow the study's specific line of inquiry and protocol. Second, the interview's questions need to be asked in an unbiased manner that provides what is needed for the study. The two main purposes of interviews are of equal importance and are essential to the research process. Interview questions are asked in an unbiased manner and result in a

conversation between the research participant and interviewer. Case study interviews require the researcher to be mindful of the study's protocol while also being friendly and asking questions in a "nonthreatening" manner (Yin, 2014, p. 110).

After the conference, the participants that we made face-to-face contact with were contacted via email and on the social media website, Facebook. They were asked if they would like to participate in an interview. The interviews were semi-structured and were used to find out more about the student's background, interest, personal and professional goals, but more specifically the motivation of their involvement. The intention of the interviews was to explore the student's involvement in extracurricular activities and advocacy efforts, emphasizing their reasons for such involvement. The interviews were conducted over the phone and were conversational so that the participants could elaborate when they needed to. All questions were asked in a friendly, unbiased manner. This helped us develop a working relationship with each of the participants so that we get the most out of our open ended interview style. Initially, there were a series of topics that were discussed in each interview. The series of topics were general guidelines of each interview. The topics helped conversations flow naturally and are listed below:

1. Background Information
 - a. Hometown
 - b. Major
 - c. Classification
 - d. Information about university
 - i. Facts about the College of Agriculture
 - ii. Size of the College of Agriculture
 - e. Involvement in extracurricular activities
2. Motivation
 - a. Reasons for involvement in extracurricular organization
 - b. Reasons for having a leadership position in extracurricular organization

- c. Description of passion for agriculture
- d. Description of passion for agriculture advocacy
- 3. Goals
 - a. Professional goals after graduation
 - b. Personal goals for extracurricular activities
 - c. Professional goals for extracurricular activities
 - d. Personal goals for advocacy events and/or efforts
 - e. Professional goals for advocacy events and/or efforts

As interviews were conducted, common patterns and concepts began to emerge from the data.

We continually revised our interview protocol to facilitate deeper understanding of the emergent patterns. In the early stages of data collection, it became obvious that the main topic of “goals” and its subtopics did not contribute to understanding why Millennial college students engaged in student advocacy efforts. Therefore, we revised the main topic of “goals” to “advocacy outlook” to better fit the data. The main topic of “advocacy outlook” appeared to focus on understanding the participants’ outlook on student advocacy. Specifically, by looking at what agriculture issues were most important to participants, participants’ daily motivation for agriculture advocacy, and where participants’ advocacy efforts were going in the future. Although a college student’s professional and personal goals did not contribute as much as their agriculture outlook, professional and personal goals appeared to be appropriate reasons for involvement in extracurricular organizations or advocacy efforts. The revisions to the interview protocol are noted by ~~strikeout text~~:

- 1. Background Information
 - a. Hometown
 - b. Major
 - c. Classification
 - d. Information about university
 - iii. Facts about the College of Agriculture
 - iv. Size of the College of Agriculture
 - e. Involvement in extracurricular activities

2. Motivation
 - a. Reasons for involvement in extracurricular organizations
 - b. Reasons for having a leadership position in extracurricular organizations
 - c. Description of passion for agriculture
 - d. Description of passion for agriculture advocacy
- ~~3. Goals~~
 - ~~a. Professional goals after graduation~~
 - ~~b. Personal goals for extracurricular activities~~
 - ~~c. Professional goals for extracurricular activities~~
 - ~~d. Personal goals for advocacy events and/or efforts~~
 - ~~e. Professional goals for advocacy events and/or efforts~~
3. Advocacy Outlook
 - a. Reasons for attending the National Agriculture Advocacy conference
 - b. Important issues related to agriculture advocacy
 - c. Reasons for other millennial college students' involvement in agriculture advocacy
 - d. How to educate other millennial college students not affiliated with agriculture about agriculture
 - e. Future of agriculture advocacy

To begin analyzing the data we collected, we looked for similar patterns or descriptions and how certain concepts connected to one another. We then manipulated the data further by tabulating the frequency of similar background characteristics, similar reasons for involvement and organizations participants were a part of, and similar important agriculture issues. To comprehend the content in the data we collected we displayed our findings in detailed profiles. Another analytic technique we consider was explanation building. According to Yin (2014), "To explain phenomenon is to stipulate a presumed set of causal links about how and/or why something happen" (p. 147). Drawing on Yin's (2014) suggestions, we looked for conceptual links between and among emergent elements to better understand how and why millennial college students engage in student advocacy efforts.

The profiles we created contributed to the persona development process. Personas were developed to display the study's findings. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the personas, and the specific number of individuals who contributed to each persona was omitted. Additionally, when the individuals who composed each persona differed based on gender, we selected a gender neutral pseudonym. For example, Taylor represents individuals with different genders. In Taylor's case, we will use male pronouns to refer to "him" for clarity; however, it is imperative to note that gender did not influence the nature of the findings. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is essential.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained the trustworthiness of a study as the argument, criteria, and questions asked that gain the reader's confidence. Trustworthiness is important to establish so readers can use a study to have a better understanding of the study's purpose. This study's trustworthiness allows it to contribute to society's knowledge of the unique characteristics of the Millennial generation, specifically it helps readers gain a better understanding of why certain Millennials engage in agricultural advocacy efforts. To establish trustworthiness, we take into careful consideration and uphold each of the four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For our purposes, we conducted shorter case study interviews. The study's interviews varied in length ranging from 40 minutes to one hour, but still remained open ended. For *credibility* purposes, each interview was recorded with permission from the participant. The interviews were then transcribed. The typed transcripts were electronically sent to the participants for

verification via email. Member-checks were conducted throughout the duration of the study. Member-checks were ongoing and allowed participants to confirm the intentions of their answers, clarify any misunderstandings we may have had, and assess the overall adequacy of the interview (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Contacting each participant to verify the accuracy of his or her interview also allowed us to ask additional questions that would contribute to the detail of our open-ended interviews. This also allowed us to confirm findings that we already thought had been established. During the member checks we followed the interview's protocol more closely. Member checks contributed to the credibility of our research. Along with completely member checks, we participated in peer debriefing as part of the credibility aspect of trustworthiness. Peer debriefing has helped keep our research honest in that our biases have been clarified and do not persuade our findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Thick description contributed to the *transferability* of this study. Transferability assures that the judgments made by readers about how relatable the study is apply to their purposes. Throughout the entire research process we have been preparing to develop a thick descriptive narrative. The thick descriptive narrative started with field notes field notes that were composed. Yin (2014) explained field notes are composed from documents, observations, and interviews (p. 124). In our field notes we made sure to describe what happened, what we thought the participants thought or how they felt, and what we thought and how we felt. The field notes that we collected were a combination of a document (the conference schedule and program), observations from attending the conference, and interviews that noted major happens, thoughts, and feelings while conducting interviews.

Dependability and *confirmability* are important and similar criteria of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, “Without dependability there is no credibility” (p. 329). The dependability criteria of trustworthiness is achieved through an external audit specifically for the process of the project. The confirmability criteria of trustworthiness was approached through an external audit, a reflexive journal specifically for the process of this project. Individual field notes were kept before and during data collection and frequently referred to throughout the data analysis process. Confirmability is needed to make sure the data collected and its reconstructions are true. Our process notes are very extensive explaining the methodological procedures and designs of the study. We have also made notes of our personal and reflexive thoughts about the expectations and motivations of the study’s participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Throughout the study, we were participant observers. “Participant-observation is a special mode of observation in which you are not merely a passive observed. Instead you assume a variety of roles within a fieldwork situation and may actually participate in the actions being studied” (Yin, 2014, p. 115). Participant observation benefited this study in two ways: Participant observation allowed us to gain access to the Farmers Fight organization which otherwise we would not have access to. This allowed us to experience what a meeting was like and what the organization’s intention was for the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference before it occurred. Participant observation also gave us the ability to perceive reality from the view point of a participant attending and experiencing the conference. We had the opportunity to see how the participants interacted at the conference and also discuss with them what they thought. This allowed us to perceive the conference from the inside rather than externally.

To make initial contact with the participants, I attended the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference as a volunteer through Texas A&M University's Farmers Fight student agriculture advocacy organization. I was allowed to volunteer because I am a member of Farmers Fight. I have attended the organization's bi-monthly meetings and contributed my ideas. I am a part of the organization's communications committee. I appreciate the organization's mission and efforts to promote agriculture positively. I participated in Farmers Fight's first "Stand Up for Agriculture Advocacy Day" apart the student body's initial response to the negative article published by yahoo. I am not as involved in the organization and its efforts as I would like to be. I want to educate people about how important agriculture is every day.

My background in agriculture stems from my grandfather being a retired cattle rancher, growing up in a rural community, and becoming involved in the 4-H organization at an early age. I consider myself as agriculture advocate because of my background and passion for agriculture. I am motivated on a daily basis to be an agriculture advocate because of all the misconceptions of agriculture in the media today. I want mass media to send out a positive message about agriculture and I believe my generation can encourage that by involving other Millennials that are not affiliated with agriculture through social media websites.

Before attending the conference as a volunteer I was not aware of the conference's activities and events. I did not know what delegates were coming or where they were coming from. I met each delegate who was one of our research participants for the first time at the conference. I

learned about them briefly at the conference and during our interview. My background, personality, and what I am involved in is very similar to some of the participants, but not others.

I became involved in extracurricular organizations because it was a way to meet people and I also knew that involvement was highly regarded in future endeavors. I enjoy the professional development aspects of my organizations, when industry professionals present about their companies or when a work shop is administered. Currently I am involved in the professional agriculture sorority, Sigma Alpha, and I am a departmental peer advisor. I am also an ambassador for study abroad. As part of the ambassadors for study abroad team, I am the team leader for the social media team. My extracurricular organizations keep me very busy outside of my coursework and I have experienced what it is like being involved in a College of Agriculture made up of seven thousand students. My experience has helped me to make connections to and understand what each of the research participants expressed in their interviews.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings will be presented by first describing each persona, followed by similarities among personas and the characteristics and/or attributes unique to each persona. Next, a summary of issues related to agriculture advocacy will be presented, followed by a summary of the participants' suggestions for recruiting Millennials to help advocate and the participants' beliefs about the future of agriculture advocacy. Direct quotes are denoted by quotation marks and italicized type.

We first made contact with the study's participants at the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference in College Station, Texas, on October 4-6, 2013. The conference brought together active student leaders, from across the country, who were motivated to advocate the importance of agriculture. The conference allowed the students to engage in dialogue with field experts, learn from featured speakers, and connect with other participants. The conference focused on how to have more productive advocacy efforts by engaging in active dialogues.

The findings presented in this section were collected from nine individuals I met at the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference. From the nine individuals I met at the conference, four unique personas were created. Participants at the conference were college students involved in extracurricular activities and agriculture advocacy efforts at their universities (i.e., membership

or leadership position held in student organizations and involvement in the production of a farmers market on campus). After completing their undergraduate degree, most participants planned to attend graduate school.

To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the personas, and the specific number of individuals who contributed to each persona was omitted. Additionally, when the individuals who composed each persona differed based on gender, we selected a gender neutral pseudonym. For example, Taylor represents individuals with different genders. In Taylor's case, we will use male pronouns to refer to "him" for clarity; however, it is imperative to note that gender did not influence the nature of the findings.

Throughout the data collection process, many individuals referred to agriculture by the abbreviated term "ag." Rather than replacing references to Ag with agriculture to provide clarity, we opted to leave the references to ag as they were used in our discussions to provide greater detail to what the participants actually said. Further, within the agriculture community, it is not uncommon for individuals to capitalize agriculture or ag, thereby, using the term as a proper noun and emphasizing the pride of the individuals involved in the community.

During our interviews with the delegates we made connections with at the National Agriculture Advocacy conference, we met four distinct individuals. Each individual has unique experiences that led them to become involved in agriculture advocacy. They also have unique interpretations of what it means to be an agriculture advocate today.

Sarah: The Perpetual Advocate

Sarah's basis of involvement was her past extracurricular organizational experience. Sarah became involved in agriculture when she joined the FFA or 4-H organization and enjoyed her experience. The FFA or 4-H organization taught her to appreciate agriculture and that influence led her to where she is today. She went to the university she attended because of its connection to agriculture. She chose to be a part of the university's college of agriculture, choosing an agriculture specific major. She explained,

I really don't know how to explain it but, I didn't come to [School] for [School], I came for the College of Agriculture because of its welcoming environment. I knew that ag was a big part of my life in high school and I still wanted to be a part of the ag community.

Sarah's past involvement and experiences even led to her organizational involvement at her university. Sarah did meat judging in high school and she wanted to continue her involvement on the meat judging team in college. At her university, she was a part of the wool judging team, with hopes of moving on to become a part of the meat judging team. Sarah explained, "Yes that's more of what I came to [School] for because I did meat judging in high school. I never did wool judging." Her interest for involvement also stemmed from the fact that she was an achiever. Sarah explained why she became involved in extracurricular organizations. She said, "I like to make things happen. I consider myself a go-getter. I just can't be involved in something without being super involved."

Sarah's main reasons and motivations for extracurricular organizational involvement outside of her normal coursework included staying busy, making friends, and connecting to her university's campus. Sarah thought that it would be a good idea to be involved in extracurricular

organizations because she liked being busy and extracurricular involvement was a great way to meet people. Sarah explained, *“In high school I was involved in everything, everything you can think of, so I said I am going to be really bored in college if I don’t do something.”* She described how she became involved in the Block and Bridle organization. *“I just heard it was a good organization and I wanted to meet people.”* Her daily motivation for involvement was the connection to her campus community it created. Sarah explained, *“You know being that I am seven hours away from home, if I ever need anything the ag community is always there.”*

Sarah thought it would be beneficial for her to take on a leadership position because it would develop her communications skills. Sarah described the reasons she accepted a leadership in the organization she was involved in. *“Because once you do that you find out a lot about yourself, to where you grow in and out of an organization, but it also shows people you care.”*

Sarah also describes how her leadership position has connected her to faculty and staff. *“With all the different organizations I am involved in a lot of people know my face and I’m not talking about my peers, they do but I’m talking about my professors and the administration at my university.”* She said that her connection with faculty have helped her with preparing for graduate school. *“When they already know who you are and they already know your face. You get great recommendations letters that way to.”* What Sarah really liked about one of her organizations is how it allows to her to connect with others and make memories with them. Sarah really likes the opportunities she has to connect with underclassman.

What I really love about [Organization] is that not only do we help with perspective students, like to try and get them to come to our university, but we also help with the retention of our students, so with the freshman of our university we got them involved in

and around campus. Sarah considered herself an agriculture advocate. She wanted to find more ways to get involved so that she could become more knowledgeable about agriculture to help with recruitment and to best represent her university. Her daily motivation to be an agriculture advocate was the fact that everyone is affected by agriculture and people needed to be educated about it. She believed to improve agriculture advocacy, as a generation, Millennials needed to get their friends who are not affiliated with agriculture involved through social media. She explained, *“I try to talk to my friends. I let them know about activities we are hosting. You know if I find something cool about ag in the news I’ll talk about it with them.”*

If someone asked who Sarah was in her academic department within her university’s College of Agriculture, the faculty would be able to give an in depth description of the ways she looked, her personality, and her work ethic because she was very connected to her university. Sarah would be really easy to find because she worked for her academic department between classes. She liked the family aspect of her university. Sarah would be the first person to volunteer at a recruitment event at her university.

Taylor: The Family Man

Similar to Sarah, Taylor liked the family aspect of his university. Taylor could be described as family oriented. Taylor’s interest in agriculture came from the influence of his family and community. Family was very important to Taylor. Taylor told us how inspirational his father has been to him learning the importance of agriculture at a young age. His father grew up in El

Salvador and then moved to America during El Salvador's civil war. Taylor described his father teaching him about agriculture. Specifically, he was taught to take care of animals.

My dad really stressed the importance of being able to feed yourself, and being able to have the responsibility of waking up in the morning making sure they (the animals) are feed and really I mean it's beautiful in my eyes.

Taylor's interest in his university and major was influenced by the helpfulness of the university's faculty and staff. Taylor thought it would be a good idea to become involved in extracurricular organizations because extracurricular involvement was a great way meet people. Through his extracurricular organizational involvement, Taylor meet a lot of friends and found extracurricular organizations was also a great way to hang out with them. Taylor's daily motivation for extracurricular involvement was the individuals he met. Taylor was motivated by the individuals that depended on him in his organization and those he could help. Taylor was motivated by his friend, Darcy. Taylor described how he reminded others of his friend and mentor Darcy. He described Darcy's extracurricular involvement and how he did not want to disappoint Darcy.

"She (Darcy) was always really outgoing, willing to help everyone with everything she could for our organization. I don't want to let her down or let our organization down."

Taylor liked the public speaking opportunities and social aspect of his extracurricular involvement most of all. Taylor explained, *"Being able to speak in front of people will help you in any day to day activity."* Taylor also explained,

A favorite thing I would say would have to be, we do a lot of social events on campus with the ag department, because there's only one other ag organization so we try to team up with them and do group night together.

Taylor decided to accept a leadership position to become more invested in his organization. Being a leader in his organization would help Taylor meet people and gain valuable skills like interviewing techniques.

Agriculture is very important to Taylor and, as stated before, Taylor's interest in agriculture came from the influence of family. Taylor's background in agriculture was very diverse with interests ranging from urban and organic farming to animal welfare. Taylor became involved in the FFA or 4-H organization and his agriculture education teacher influenced him greatly. Taylor was agriculture advocate and became involved in agriculture advocacy very early in life. Taylor wanted to educate people about the importance of agriculture, especially through the issues of urban farming and animal welfare. Taylor wanted others to know their story. He explained,

I feel everyone has a finger in the fight, but when you say urban farming, a lot of people don't think that they can relate to agriculture, but then I always tell them my story. I tell them I had this tiny backyard and I was raising chickens out of it and I was seeing agriculture.

If we needed to find Taylor on campus it would be really easy. Taylor would be at every extracurricular agriculture organization meeting and at every university recruitment event for the College of Agriculture.

Whitney: The Visionary

Whitney is a visionary: She always is thinking about the future and how to create change in her organizations and university for the better. Her daily motivations for involvement are to not only make her organization better, but her fellow members better. She wants to be a part of something great.

Whitney became involved in extracurricular organizations because being involved was a great way for her to meet people. Involvement in extracurricular organizations was also fun for her and she believed that through her involvement she was productive. She thought she could be a part of history. Whitney's daily motivation for involvement was positive change. Whitney liked the professional development aspects of the organizations she was involved in most. She explained,

Really the ones that bring in executives and companies because that shows that the clubs not only care about the students' futures that are in it, but the executives in the industry care about us. They want to have a role in shaping our minds and shaping our opinions so I think that's a really cool thing to have for a club.

She especially enjoyed being a student liaison to her College of Agriculture's dean's office through her organizational involvement. Whitney explained why she wanted to be a part of the specific organization that gave her that opportunity. *"It was a chance to serve my college and also give the students a voice of the dean's office and give the dean's office a voice to the students which I think is really important in any college."*

Whitney accepted a leadership position in one of her organizations to learn how to follow and when to trust others. She also wanted to figure out how to turn her weaknesses into strengths and be successful in the future. Whitney described the importance of leadership and how leadership could contribute to her success later in life. She explained,

I am the committee chair for our College's annual chili cook off and that's really important to me because as I can see if you know how to lead, you know how to be successful, no matter what position or what prong on the ladder you are in the business world. You can be successful because if you can follow as leader you know how to listen and I think listening is the number one problem in the world of communication.

When describing how leadership could lead to success, Whitney emphasized that being able to follow orders as a leader is just as important as being able to make an important decision in certain situations. She believed that, as a leader, being able to follow those she was leading connected her to them in a way that allowed her to actively listen to their suggestions, needs, and desires.

Whitney's family was involved in agriculture and she enjoyed helping out on her family's farm while growing up. Whitney's passion for agriculture began at a very early age and her passion is what led her to be an agriculture advocate. Whitney considered herself as an agricultural advocate. She is interested in seeing both sides of issue before making her discussion or judgment. Whitney explained, *"I think it is important that people know both sides of the story before making a decision."* Her agriculture advocacy efforts stemmed from her family's background and her future vision for agriculture advocacy. Her motivation to be involved in agriculture advocacy was the fact that people need to be educated about agriculture. She

described her experience recruiting perspective students of her university at a local high school and how it related to agriculture advocacy.

You know I had just a student today, he is determined to be a vet and we were talking and something just as simple as him realizing he has to have an undergrad degree before he can do vet school, you know, and that may not seem to tie with ag advocacy very much until I started thinking about it afterwards and it amazed me that they don't even know how much schooling it takes to be a vet, they don't even know how dedicated those people are.

She thought that the motivation of other Millennial college students to be involved in agriculture advocacy was also educating the public. The agriculture advocacy efforts Whitney was involved in at her university had to do with recruitment. She believed to improve agriculture advocacy efforts in the future university education needed to focus on a more applied course curriculum. Whitney explained how her university's curriculum began to include applied courses that stimulated real world experiences. She explained referring to her College of Agriculture's dean,

He has people in every industry that connects to the college and their sole purpose is to change the way that college interacts with students, so changing majors to get us more real world experience, and putting us in those classes that will give us the positions of okay you're in your job this is what's happening what can you do.

Tom: The Traditionalist

Tom can be described as more traditional. Tom chose to attend his university because of family legacy. His father and grandfather both attended his university and he grew up going to university football games. *"We have been coming down here forever for [School] football*

games.” Tom chose his major based on past experience. He chose his major because he enjoyed growing up on his family’s farm or ranch.

Networking was very important to Tom. He was involved in extracurricular organizations because he enjoyed meeting people and creating both a professional and social network for the future. He explained, *“I just enjoy meeting as many people as possible. I am a big believer in building networks, getting to know the more people the better especially later in life.”* Describing the extent his professional network, Tom explained how he has spoken to almost all university faculty associated with his major.

There’s only like one person that I haven’t talk too personally in the Ag Econ. department and really he just keeps his door closed all the time so I never really get to see him or say hi to him.

Tom became involved in extracurricular organizations outside of his required coursework because being involved could help him seek out opportunities to pursue his goals. Tom realized that he needed to make professional connections and gain the experience necessary to be competitive for professional school. He explained his experience,

I am actually one hundred percent different that I was when I was in high school. When I was in high school, I was very to myself. I knew that if I wanted to get into vet school I was going to have to get used to meeting people and putting my name out there.

Making connections and building a network, like stated before, was very important to Tom. His daily motivation for involvement was to give back to the university and organizations that had

given him so much. He took on a leadership role because he saw that his organization could be better and he wanted to make it better while also leaving a legacy.

Tom considered himself to be an agriculture advocate. He was an agriculture advocate because of his passion for agriculture and agricultural background. The issue of animal agriculture was very important to him. He also realizes that people need to be more educated because they do not realize everything that agriculture provides. He believed educating the public about what the agriculture industry provides was his daily motivation as well as the motivation of other Millennial agriculture advocates. He thought a conference that included all aspects agriculture industry could help advocacy efforts in the future. Tom also suggested that utilizing social media websites could help advocacy efforts. Tom really liked that the Farmers Fight extracurricular agriculture advocacy organization at Texas A&M University started as an agriculture advocacy movement to respond to a negative article about agriculture.

Uniqueness of each persona:

Sarah: The Perpetual Advocate

Sarah was unique from the other participants because she was involved in very unique extracurricular organizations. She said she was involved in “Collegiate 4-H, Xi Sigma Pi (the forestry fraternity), College of Agriculture college council...which is a part of the executive board of student government.” She also said, “I am Block and Bridle, I am in the meat science association. I am in Collegiate FFA, I am on the meat judging team and I play intermural volleyball.”

Sarah attended the National Agriculture Advocacy conference for unique reasons. She attended the conference not only because she wanted to learn more about agriculture advocacy and the agriculture industry, but because she was selected to be funded by her university. She explained,

Two people were sent from Ag ambassadors and the other three spots were open. My advisor emailed me and asked me if I would be interested in it and I said yes. She said there was a limited amount of spots so you will have to have an interview with the Dean. If he gives you the go ahead, he'll fund you and then you can go.

Sarah was involved in the agriculture advocacy effort of a farmer's market on the campus of her university. She explained how she promoted the agriculture at the event.

My marketing point to all of the students was that our vegetables that are served in the dining facilities are grown within 300 miles of the school. For some people that is nothing and they can get food closer, but our campus is in the middle of a large city and has to feed 25,000 people each day.

Taylor: The Family Man

Taylor was also involved in unique extracurricular organizations. He had the opportunity to be involved in the re-establishment an organization. He explained,

I have been in the Collegiate FFA since I got here, for that I am just a member... but I am also starting the Manners organization, which is the Minorities in Agriculture organization affiliated with natural resources and related sciences.

Taylor was involved in unique agriculture advocacy efforts at his university. He described how a farm visit he assisted with impacted the community. Taylor explained how is university conducted the farm visit.

What we do is invite all of the schools all over the [Name] Valley, I believe 3rd and 4th graders to the ranch and we take them on a tour. They get to pet all of our sheep and goats, cattle horses; you know whatever we can round up. We teach them something about each animal and even the farm equipment.

Whitney: The Visionary

Like the other participants, Whitney was unique because of the extracurricular organizations she was involved in. She explained, “*I’m in Sigma Alpha, I’m actually a member of the Poultry Science club, Agriculture Communicators of Tomorrow, as well as Collegiate Farm Bureau.*” Whitney’s involvement in agriculture advocacy efforts was also unique. She explained how the university recruitment efforts she assisted with related to agriculture advocacy.

You know I had just a student today, he is determined to be a vet and we were talking and something just as simple as him realizing he has to have an undergrad degree before he can do vet school, you know, and that may not seem to tie with ag advocacy very much until I started thinking about it afterwards and it amazed me that they don’t even know how much schooling it takes to be a vet, they don’t even know how dedicated those people are.

Tom: The Traditionalist

Tom was unique from the other participants because he was involved in unique organizations. At his university he was involved in a fraternity and pre-vet society. Like Sarah, he also had a very unique reason why he attended the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference. Tom

explained that he was required to attend a leadership conference for one of his organizations. He explained that he chose to attend the National Advocacy Conference because it helped promote the agriculture industry.

I am a departmental ambassador for the department of Animal Sciences and our advisors told us at the beginning of the year that they expected each of us to do something outside of [School], to leave [School] and attend a leadership conference. I wanted to go to a leadership conference or something that had to do with something applicable so that instead of making myself a better leader or whatever, but how to promote the industry better.

Similar Characteristics and Attributes:

Affiliation with Agriculture

Each of the research participants were affiliated with agriculture in some way. Some participants grew up in agriculture, having worked on his or her family's farm. *"I grew up on a horse farm we had about 30 horses growing up..."* (Tom). Other participants were introduced to agriculture through an extracurricular organization they become involved in. *"So I was in 4-H from fourth grade until high school and I'm a collegiate 4-Her"* (Sarah). Some participants became connected to agriculture through both family or community background and extracurricular involvement.

Seeing the influence of farmers in my life was really important you know how changing economy has greatly affected them." *"A lot of the kids in my neighborhood were teenagers and they were in the FFA Chapter of our High School, Morton Ranch High School in Katy and I really wanted to join* (Taylor).

Referring to agriculture, Whitney discussed her affiliation to agriculture, *“growing up having [agriculture] all around me.”*

Connections with Faculty

All of the participants discussed the connections they had with faculty members at the university they attended. One of the participants discussed how her organization’s advisors attended the organization’s meetings and let them know about upcoming opportunities.

“Actually we have weekly meetings Thursday night for about two hours so it is a large time commitment and they set in on every one of our meetings and it’s really nice because you get to know them. Its great networking and whenever they see something awesome they let you know” (Whitney).

Although the participants discussed their connections with faculty, each participant had his or her own unique relationship to share.

“I work in the dean’s office and so yea so I know, I have a few contacts in agronomy as well, my dad’s an agronomist for the university and that gives me some extension connections so I almost know, there’s only like one person that I haven’t talk to personally in the Ag Econ. department and uh and really he just keeps his door closed all the time so I never really get to see him or say hi to him” (Tom).

A participant explained how her faculty connections were helpful to her while preparing for graduate school and how they make her feel at home at the university she attends.

“It makes it a lot easier on you and them when they already know who you are and they already know you face.” “You know being that I am seven hours away from home if I ever need anything the Ag community is always there” (Sarah).

Another participant explained, *“even our professors will come out there and talk to us in the halls, it’s not about class usually it is just about random chatting and getting to know each other”* (Taylor). Taylor really liked that faculty makes an effort to get to know students. This motivates Taylor to do well in class.

Involvement “Representative” Student Organizations

The participants were involved in a select student organization that focused on the recruitment and promote of the College of Agriculture at their university. The organization was known as Ambassadors for the College of Agriculture. A participant explained his responsibilities as a member of the organization,

We work events for the college, recruit, go to high schools, work with all freshman in the agriculture dorm and get them involved with a lot of faculty, we go on trips to the research farms and faculty come along (Tom).

A part of the organization, participants served as liaisons between fellow students and the College of Agriculture.

I am also a part of the [Organization] which are the recruiters. We are called the face of the university because we go to a lot of conferences and recruiting events such as the Texas FFA Convention (Taylor).

Most participants applied for this organization and were selected after being recommended by a faculty member.

One of the teachers asked me to do it as a freshman. I didn't know who they were or anything. I didn't even think I would get in because it was an application process. I just did it to make her happy and ended up getting in (Tom).

"For the [Organization] I kind of actually got volunteered to be an ambassador two years ago and once I was in the role I feel in love with it" (Whitney).

Unique Characteristics and Attributes:

Types of Organizational Involvement

The types of organizations the participants were involved in varied, besides the common representative organization for the College of Agriculture at their universities. Each of the participants had very broad interests and was involved in very unique organizations. *"I have been in the Collegiate FFA since I got here. For that I am just a member... but I am also starting the Manners organization, which is the minorities in Agriculture organization in natural resources and related sciences" (Taylor). "I'm in Sigma Alpha, I'm actually a member of the Poultry Science club, Agriculture Communicators of Tomorrow, as well as Collegiate Farm Bureau" (Whitney).*

Collegiate 4-H, Xi Sigma Pi (the forestry fraternity), College of Ag college council...which is a part of the executive board of student government." "I am Block and Bridle, I am in the meat science association. I am in Collegiate FFA, I am on the meat judging team and I play intermural volleyball (Sarah).

"I'm involved in a fraternity. I am Kappa Alpha-KA. I'm in pre-vet club" (Tom).

Reasons for Attending the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference

Each of the participants had very unique reasons why they attended the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference hosted by Texas A&M University's Farmers Fight agriculture advocacy organization. Some of the participants had past experience in agriculture advocacy and intentions to start an agriculture advocacy extracurricular organization at the universities. *"I was really involved in doing agriculture advocacy in high school. It was my favorite thing to do. If it could be a profession I would definitely do that"* (Taylor). Taylor and the other participants that attended the conference from his university intended to start an agriculture advocacy organization. Other participants were required to attend a leadership conference for the Ambassadors organization they were involved in and they chose the national agriculture advocacy conference. They were funded by the organization.

I am a departmental ambassador for the department of Animal Sciences and our advisors told us at the beginning of the year that they expected each of us to do something outside of [School], to leave [School] and attend a leadership conference. I wanted to go to a leadership conference or something that had to do with something applicable so that instead of making myself a better leader or whatever, but how to promote the industry better (Tom).

Two people were sent from Ag ambassadors and the other three spots were open. My advisor emailed me and asked me if I would be interested in it and I said yes. She said there was limited amount of spots so you will have to have an interview with the dean. If he gives you the go ahead he'll fund you and then you can go (Sarah).

Being an ambassador on of our biggest roles is advocacy through recruitment and just talking to students and filling out the misconceptions that way. When our professor told

us there was this conference and it was the first time it would be nationally available we decided to jump on the opportunity (Whitney).

Agriculture Advocacy Efforts

All of the participants considered themselves as agriculture advocates. Being agriculture advocates, they were very passionate about agriculture and each had specific issues that were important to them. Taylor was very passionate about organic and urban farming as well as animal agriculture. Taylor explained,

A lot of people have the idea that we just kind of you know kick and push animals into the slaughter house they don't realize that most of the time animals are raised on the farm and then moved. Being able to move away from that and being able to go home and be able to go these chickens and I'm like I'm probably the only person in the city who has this, who has this responsibility, and it was something really beautiful, it was something-agriculture in the middle of this huge city.

Tom was really interested in a local issue in his state, a hog farm and its implications. He explained the issue and what he thought about it.

The reason is, is that they think having a hog farm on the buffalo river is going to harm it from phosphorus run off from the manure which we don't know that yet we don't have scientific fact to base it but so 1) farmers in [State] are starting to get kind of the rap that they're kind of being cruel to the environment, 2) people don't realize where their food is coming from and that's a big issue. Like um we're having this hug local food movement in Arkansas which is great because promoting local agriculture but it's kind of "villianizing" the conventional producer.

Sarah was interested in meat safety regulations and reason for or against meat consumption. She said,

We actually encountered a couple of people that said no I don't eat meat. We asked why and they said we don't trust harvesting hormones. That was just our main goal that hormones are not bad they are in lower levels than things like soy.

Whitney was very passionate about genetically modified organisms and shared what she believed.

It's such a sensitive topic. When you say that in public it's almost like you're evil just from bring it up because there's tension either way and that's one thing I push really hard because I am in full support of GMOs. I do believe we need a lot more research on it and we need some clear laws that define what can and cannot be done.

Along with specific agriculture related issues that are important to each participant, each explained unique agriculture advocacy events that they participated in on their college campuses. The agriculture advocacy events that participants were involved in included a farmer's markets, ranch tours, and university recruitment. A couple of the participants described a farmer's market that was held on campus. Sarah explained the farmers market and what her marketing point for the event was. She said,

We have the market in the fall semester. It was run by the College of Agriculture and the dining halls. My marketing point to all of those students was that our vegetables that are served in the dining facilities are grown within 300 miles of the school. For some people that is nothing and they can get food closer, but our campus is in the middle of a large city and has to feed 25,000 people each day.

Tom explained a similar farmers market where his organization, College of Agriculture Ambassadors, was represented. When he explained the events that his organization attend he said, *“There is a farmer’s market on campus every Thursday. We represent that. We kind of started that.”* Another participant described a farm visit that took place at his university. Taylor explained that his university owned a ranch and that they invited elementary schools on tours of the ranch to educate younger students. Taylor said,

What we do is invite all of the schools all over the [Name] Valley out, I believe 3rd and 4th graders to the ranch and we take them on a tour. They get to pet all of our sheep and goats, cattle horses; you know whatever we can round up. We teach them something about each animal and the farm equipment.

Like Taylor, Whitney also described her experience promoting agriculture through advocacy efforts. Whitney explained how the agriculture advocacy efforts at her university are focused on recruiting new students. She explained her experience while she was visiting a local high school. She said,

You know I had just a student today who he is determined to be a veterinarian and we were talking and something just as simple as him realizing he has to have an undergrad degree before he can do vet school. You know and that may not seem to tie with Ag advocacy very much until I started thinking about it afterwards and it amazed me that they don’t even know how much schooling it takes to be a veterinarian, they don’t even know how dedicated those people are.”

The participants of this study are involved in very unique agriculture advocacy events and efforts.

Participant Recommendations:

Along with finding out what agriculture issues are most important to them, we gained insight from the delegates about why they consider themselves to be agriculture advocates. We learned about the agriculture advocacy efforts they participate in, where they think their efforts are going as a generation, and what they think can be done in the future to better their efforts. The participants had very unique reasons why they each became involved in agriculture advocacy. Taylor was an agriculture advocate because of his past involvement in agriculture advocacy which started in high school. *“Seeing the influence of farmers in my life was really important you know...I was really involved in doing agriculture advocacy in high school”* (Taylor). Tom was an agriculture advocate because of the importance of agriculture. *“I think the really big one is just the plain fact that without agriculture you have nothing you don’t have food, you don’t have fuel, you don’t have clothing, you don’t have anything”* (Tom). Sarah considered herself an agriculture advocate because she is trying to find ways to get more people involved in agriculture. *“I guess after the conference I’ve been trying to find more and more ways to get people involved in agriculture and let them know”* (Sarah). Whitney was an agriculture advocate because of her passion for agriculture.

My passion for it, growing up having it all around me and seeing how many things are being taken away. My little brother, he’s quite a bit younger than me and just watching the things he’s learning in school compared to what I was learning in school about agriculture (Whitney).

The daily motivation for their involvement in agriculture advocacy differed among participants. Reasons for their daily motivation include education, passion, and family influence. A couple of

the participants were motivated by the public's lack of knowledge about agriculture for the most part. The participants wanted to educate their friends, fellow classmates, and entire generation about the importance of agriculture and its truths. Sarah said that everyone is affected by agriculture.

No one can say that they do not come across and use agriculture products every day of their lives. This occurs but they don't understand how it gets from nature to their front door. My goal is to always try and remedy that (Sarah).

Tom also briefly discussed what Sarah explained. Tom said,

[Agriculture] just needs people to advocate it right now. I mean, people have been saying it is a dying field but people don't understand what agriculture entails. Food supply just doesn't automatically stop at the grocery store.

Along with this, Whitney was motivated by passion. She wants to help people learn. Taylor's daily motivation for agriculture advocacy is different than what motivated the other participants. Taylor is motivated by family. *"What can motivate you more than your family? In my mind there is not. I am heavily influenced by my farming family back home"* (Taylor).

The participants then discussed what they thought their generation's intentions were for agriculture advocacy, specifically through why they thought other participants attended the National Agriculture Advocacy Conference. Each of the participants had different ideas for other Millennials' advocacy involvement. Tom thought the Millennial generation's intention for agriculture advocacy was to spread education efforts; whereas, Whitney thought their intention stemmed from their passion for agriculture. Sarah thought other Millennials attended the

National Advocacy Conference to become more knowledgeable about agriculture and Taylor thought their intention was to learn how to expand the agriculture advocacy events and efforts at Taylor's university.

The participants explained how they could get their generation more involved in agriculture advocacy, specifically Millennials that have no affiliation to agriculture. These thoughts differed among participants. Sarah explained that being open-minded would help get other Millennials involved in advocacy efforts.

We need to stay open minded. Many people get turned off to new situations or ideas by radicals. We need to stay open and see what makes them think the way they do and then show them why we think the way we do (Sarah).

Whitney suggested establishing an organization that connected the community with industry professionals. *"I think that one of the best ways is starting a club for it and seeing if we can hold a monthly meeting or something with the community and kind of having speakers come and talk"* (Whitney). Some of the participants suggested keeping producing positive media advertisements to promote agriculture. *"Keep building and we're doing a good job as a nation this year with all the advertisements. That is one of the first steps in getting people involved. They're taking big steps this year"* (Tom). Taylor suggested spreading the word.

From [when I was] little, I have tried to teach others but getting the word spread fast enough just seems to be impossible. Spreading the word by mouth is of course always effective, but we need to show society the importance of agriculture and the impact it has on our economy" (Taylor).

The participants also explained what they see for the future of agriculture advocacy. All participants agreed the Millennial generation has much work to do. Whitney explained how the future of agriculture advocacy can be improved through more advocacy organization. To improve agriculture advocacy efforts in the future Whitney suggested starting an organization, similar to the Farmers Fight student organization, for the community. Whitney explained that the club should connect the community and involve them with industry professionals. Other participants believed that improvement could be achieved through creative messaging on social media websites.

Our generation has a lot of work to do. We are going to have to be creative on how we send the message out, it will have to be catchy enough to keep a viewer's attention long enough to get our message across. Statistics say we only have two seconds of attention before we start to lose people. With such an important message to spread, agricultural advocates of our generation have our work cut out for us (Taylor).

Sarah elaborated on Taylor's explanation and said, *"I believe it will depend on social media. We will only be successful if we keep up with the times. Many organizations are doing so."* Like the other participants, Tom thought positive social media messaging could help the future of agriculture advocacy. He said that he thought the agriculture industry had a few informative media campaigns and commercials. *"Then the Dodge commercial with 'God made a Farmer' that is a motive to keep advocating for agriculture. It is just need into today's time"* (Tom).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the influences of millennial college students' involvement in student advocacy efforts. To understand the influences of Millennials involved in student advocacy, we looked specifically at Millennial college students involved in agriculture advocacy efforts at agricultural influenced universities. The Millennial generation also known as GenY, Echo Boomers, C Generation, M Generation, and NextGen was born in 1979-2000 (Sweeney, 2005). We looked specifically at Millennials born in 1989-1996 who attended college as undergraduate and graduate students.

Approached inductively, the findings of this study emerged from data collected from nine purposively-selected Millennials who were involved in agriculture advocacy efforts at their universities. The data collected from our interviews resulted in the outcome of four unique individuals: Sarah, Taylor, Tom, and Whitney (see Figure 1).

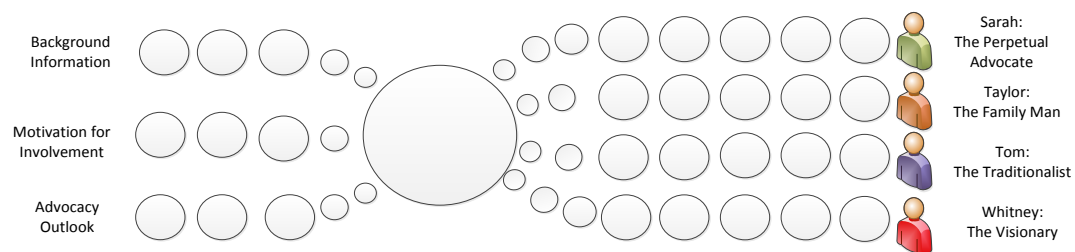


Figure 1. This figure highlights the emergent topics that were used to describe the influences of student involvement, which were also included in the development of each persona.

Why this matters:

This study used a naturalistic design while drawing on theory a priori. We relied on Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) for our initial theoretical guidance to better understand why and how Millennials engage in student advocacy. Although it is uncommon for qualitative studies to use theory a priori, it is not always inappropriate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using theory a priori was appropriate in this case because several studies have noted the utility of social cognitive theory in situational research (i.e., dividing a situation into manageable components; personal, environmental, and behavioral; Wood & Bandura, 1989; Bandura, 2001a; Bandura, 2001b; Pajaras et al., 2009). Because we investigated student activism in a specific context and situation, drawing on SCT enabled us to divide the situation into more manageable parts; thereby, enabling us to gain a greater level of understanding.

Drawing on the guidance provided by SCT as explained by Bandura (2001), an individual's way of thinking influences or directs his or her actions; therefore, understanding how and why Millennial college students' engage in student advocacy may be explained by exploring the three components of SCT: Personal determinants, environmental determinants, and behavioral determinants. The determinants of SCT are equally dependent on one another, assuming a triadic reciprocal causation model (Bandura, 2001b, p. 267).

Personal Determinants:

The personal determinants of SCT can be described as characteristics that make a certain person unique. Personal determinants include biological factors as well as a person's cultural influence (Bandura, 2001b, p. 267).

Focusing specifically on characteristics unique to the Millennial generation as the personal determinants of this study, we found that Millennials are achievers. Sarah explained why she became involved in extracurricular organizations. She said, "I like to make things happen. I consider myself a go-getter. I just can't be involved in something without being super involved." Along with striving for high achievements, Millennials are family-oriented, cherishing their relationships with their parents. For example, Taylor was greatly influenced by his family. His father taught him the importance of agriculture and his family helped him decide what university he attended. Like Taylor, Tom was also influenced by his family about where he attended college. Tom attended his university because of family legacy.

We found that Millennials are confident. Another characteristic of Tom was his confidence in the fact that he could do what was needed to be successful. He discussed how important it was for him to build both a professional and social network for himself. Then he went on to describe how extensive his network was and had become while in college. Whitney was very similar to Tom. She had a vision to create change and she was confident in her ability to positively improve the organization she was a part of.

Findings support what is found in the literature, but reasons for Millennials' unique characteristics vary. According to Lowery (2004), Millennials are confident for two major reasons. Millennials are confident in their ability to be the next generation and because of technological expertise. Whitney represents how Millennials are confident in their ability to be the next generation because she is always to make things better. She is a visionary. How the literature described Millennials to be confident because of their technological expertise was not represented in the study, but the fact that their confidence helps them to achieve their goals was displayed by Sarah's motivation of achievement.

The literature also describes the Millennial generation as family-oriented, this appears to be directly related with Taylor and Tom's commitment to family. Monaco and Martin (2007) suggested that Millennials' close relationship with the parents, their environment, makes them feel special and gives them great confidence (Monaco & Martin, 2007). Being encouraged by their parents has also been suggested to lead Millennials to work hard to be successful, taking advantage of opportunities to give back. "They have engaged in numerous academic, extracurricular and service pursuits; in helping others and addressing social problems" (Elam et al., 2007, p. 22).

Environmental Determinants:

The environmental determinants of SCT can be explained by the physical and social setting an individual is involved in. A student's social setting is any external interaction they have in a

certain context. The literature suggested reasons why Baby Bombers and Generation X were involved in advocacy efforts in the past, specifically having to do with the characteristics of college campuses. For example, according to Van Dyke, “Activist subcultures may have endured on college campuses over many generations” (Van Dyke, 1998, p. 227). The symbols, ideologies, and opinions of past activist groups were kept alive in certain settings like book stores and coffee shops at the universities affiliated with advocacy efforts. Student advocacy occurred on elite campuses. Van Dyke (1998) explained how student advocacy efforts depended on faculty influence and institution size. “Students at larger universities may become lost and isolated due to the large number of students and lack of interaction with faculty and may therefore become interested in protest activity” (Van Dyke, 1998, p. 206).

In the development of this study we considered the environmental determinants to be college campus where Millennial college students would participate in advocacy efforts, but from a review of the literature we realized that the environmental determinants of this study would be the actual change in the environment of Millennials after coming to college. This can be explained by the unique characteristics of Millennials. Having a close relationship with their parents, Millennials were sheltered while growing up. Parents of Millennials focused on scheduled lifestyles through engagement of extracurricular activities (Monaco & Martin, 2007). After being accustomed to a sheltered lifestyle growing up, Millennials wanted that same sheltered environment on the campus of the university attended. Lowery (2004) described Millennials as “the focus of the most sweeping youth safety movement in American history” (p. 89). Millennial college students showed concern over campus crime and student conduct.

Majors influences of millennial college students' can be explained by both the personal and environmental determinates stated above, but another major environmental determinant that emerged from our study is the type of environment the university's faculty creates from thier connections with students. All of the participants described the importance of their relationship with their university's faculty support the finding of Van Dyke (1998). The participants' involvement was influence by the invested influence of their professors or mentors. Some of the participants' reasons or motivates stemmed from their connection to campus because of faculty influence and welcoming environment their university's faculty created.

The unique characteristics and motivations of Millennials involved in agriculture advocacy efforts at their universities are important to understand. Sweeny (2005) explained, there is a "subtle but large-scale shift that is quietly taking place in popular culture today" (p. 165) according to prominent sociologists as Millennials attend college, begin to vote, and enter the work force. These characteristics and motivations explain why and how millennial college students are involved in student advocacy efforts. They could help predict the future direction of their university because of millennial influence and how employers can accommodate their newest employees.

The characteristics and motivations of millennial college students involved in advocacy efforts could predict how politically active they are later in life. "Millennials will soon begin to affect national and local elections, although from the 2004 elections indicates that as a percentage of overall voters, they have not yet begun to exercise their power" (Sweeny, 2005, p. 165). With this being said, a major focus of high education is to prepare students to carry out their civic

duties of democracy. One of the ways institutions of high education introduce students to becoming politically involved is through advocacy and activism efforts on campus (Hamrick, 1998). Thus, their involvement in campus advocacy events could spark an interest that they want to continue later on.

Knowledge of the characteristics of millennial college students involved in advocacy efforts can help professors connect with students on a deeper level, creating room for increased academic success. “Frequent and quality contact between students and faculty can increase the motivation and commitment of the Millennial student” (Monaco, 2007, p. 45). If professors and other faculty at universities become aware of what Millennials are motivated by and what they are passionate about, they can have conversations about such passions on a regular basis. Having quality

Limitations:

Participants included in this study attended four year universities. Further, participants only described their involvement in extracurricular organizations and advocacy efforts at the four-year universities they attended. The study does not investigate or take into account for influences of Millennial college students’ involvement in advocacy efforts at two year colleges or technical schools. To gather a deeper understanding of why Millennial college students participate in advocacy efforts, future studies should investigate college students’ involvement in advocacy efforts at two year colleges, four year universities, and technical schools. Additionally, this study is not representative of all four year university because the study’s focus is its participants who

attended the National Agriculture Advocacy conference, representing only seven four year universities. Moreover, we cannot generalize the findings beyond the individuals who were included in this study.

For this study, to describe the influences of millennial college student involvement we specifically looked at Millennial college students involved in agriculture advocacy efforts at agriculture influenced universities. Several factors that influence student involvement in agriculture advocacy may be similar or the same as factors that influence student involvement in other types of advocacy. Critics suggested that looking specifically at a certain group of students involved in the same types of advocacy efforts may not represent why Millennial college students engage in advocacy efforts as a whole; thus the finding should only be used as suggestions when referring to other types of advocacy efforts, other than agriculture advocacy. To achieve a better representation of why Millennial college students engage in advocacy efforts as a whole, future research needs conducted to include students involved in more than one type of advocacy effort.

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