

Glitz, Glamour, and the Farm: Portrayal of Agriculture as the Simple Life

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Abstract

Reality television has taken America by storm with programming ranging from extreme stunts to police adventures to spoofs on segments of society. Agriculture has been a participant in the reality television boom through a series called "The Simple Life" in which two Hollywood debutantes explore the "realities" of farm life in Arkansas. This study examines the impact of this portrayal of agriculture and its effects on viewers' impressions of the industry. Four focus groups were used to investigate the potential effects of an agriculturally based reality television show on viewers' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of agriculture. Results indicated those with agricultural knowledge viewed the portrayal of farm life as inaccurate and disturbing, while those without agricultural literacy found the program entertaining, if not exactly "real." Those viewers lacking in agricultural literacy realized that the program did not accurately portray real agricultural life, but could not discern where the program failed in its accurate representation. Viewers with agricultural backgrounds found the series did not accurately reflect the amount of labor and intellectual capacity needed to produce food and fiber. The portrayal of agriculture as "hickish" and "backwoods" reinforced traditional stereotypes. This study suggests that the agricultural industry may be well served in further exploration of the impact of broadcast entertainment programming on the public's agricultural literacy.

Introduction

Overalls, pitchforks and tractors are images people associate with agriculture. "Today, the public's image of agriculture is a kaleidoscope of left-over attitudes and images of what agriculture was in the '40s, '50s, and '60s" (Coon & Cantrell, 1985, p. 22). Although agriculture significantly affects the life of every individual, it continues to be a topic neglected in the mass media (Stringer & Thomson, 1999). Research on the portrayal of agriculture in the mass media has primarily included the print media's coverage of

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agriculture (i.e., Cartmell & King, 2005; Doerfert & Whaley, 2003; Lundy & Irani, 2004; Ruth & Eubanks, 2004; Sitton, Terry, Cartmell & Keys, 2004; Whitaker & Dyer, 2000). Agriculture communication scholars have yet to explore the portrayal of agriculture in broadcast entertainment media, specifically television. Based on the empirical evidence that supports the power and influence of television on viewers' attitudes, opinions and perceptions, the portrayal of agriculture on television programming is an area requiring investigation.

Among television genres, reality television has been the topic of contemporary cultural debate. "As a presentation of non-actors in legitimately natural settings and situations working without a script, reality TV stakes its claim with viewers to regard its depictions as unadorned and spontaneous truthful documentation of natural reality" (Bagley, 2001, p. 1). This depiction of reality television is challenged by some who believe that reality television is nothing more than a blend of fact and fiction through recreating natural events (Bagley, 2001).

Reality television began to appear as a distinctive genre in the late 1980s (Hill & Quin, 2001). "Reality programming is a new, growing trend in both programming and viewership" (Joniak, 2001, p. 5). "Reality television holds a unique power in that the images it purports to depict accurately, or at least viewers take for granted as true significations, affect how our society experiences and reacts to the subjects of a text" (Joniak, 2001, p. 68). The assumed realistic nature of reality television programming is closely associated with the television talk-show genre. Both of these television genres are similar in that they "create audiences by breaking cultural rules, by managed shocks, by shifting our conceptions of what is acceptable, by transforming the bases for cultural judgment, by redefining deviance and appropriate reactions to it, and by eroding social barriers, inhibitions and cultural distinctions" (Abt & Seesholtz, 1994, p. 171).

Contradiction surrounds this television phenomenon in that "network executives say they'd be happy to be rid of it" yet "still it mutates across the airwaves like a disease, growing nastier in its new forms" (Kronke, 2004, D1). For a phenomenon that blossomed only a few years ago, reality programming dominates broadcast television (Joniak, 2001; Kronke, 2004).

Although reality television can be found on any major network in the United States, Fox is one of a handful of networks that has significantly contributed to the phenomenal growth of reality television programming. In 2002, Fox was reportedly developing a nonfiction comedy that mirrored another "hickfest" like "Green Acres" (Rogers, 2003a). In December 2003, "The Simple Life" was unveiled by Fox as "the Green Acres-inspired show

that will follow hotel scion [Paris] Hilton and [Nicole] Richie as they move in with a farm family for five weeks" (Rogers, 2003a). Basically, the show followed two young female celebrities from Beverly Hills as they lived and worked on a small family farm in Altus, Ark. Despite the anticipated failure of the show, the premiere of "The Simple Life" dominated its primetime timeslot with 13 million viewers and attracted virtually all key ratings demographics, specifically becoming the highest-rated program of the night for the adults 18-34 demographic (Rogers, 2003b). The second episode to air scored season-high ratings for the network, suggesting that millions of viewers across the country witnessed this mass media portrayal of agriculture and farm life.

Literature Review

Although there is strong evidence that supports the increasing popularity of reality television, there has been limited academic research conducted on this modern-day genre of television programming (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003; Joniak, 2001). The little research that has been conducted has focused on the potential negative effects that result from heavy viewing of specific types of reality television programs. For example, Davis and Mares (1998) examined the effects of talk-show viewing on teenage audiences. Their hypotheses posed negative effects as the result of heavy talk-show viewing, including viewers overestimating the frequency of deviant behaviors, viewers becoming desensitized to the suffering of others, and viewers trivializing the importance of social issues. The results indicated that only the first of the three hypotheses was true, in that teenage talk-show viewers do tend to overestimate the frequency of deviant behaviors.

Oliver and Armstrong (1995) explored the effect of viewer attitudes and opinions on their enjoyment of fictional crime shows. This study suggested that viewer enjoyment of the fictional crime shows was positively related to viewers' existing attitudes. That is, viewers who already had attitudes and opinions supporting austere law enforcement and racially intolerant opinions found crime shows, like "Cops," more enjoyable because they reinforced the viewers' preconceived attitudes.

Nabi et al. (2003) advanced the reality television literature base by exploring the reasons for the appeal of reality television for viewers as well as the characteristics of reality television viewers. Based on their uses and gratifications approach, the authors suggest that reality television be characterized as voyeur TV. Furthermore, results indicate that regular viewers are motivated by the entertainment value, whereas casual viewers are motivated by boredom. Following the recommendations of Nabi et al. (2003) encouraging further research, this study investigates the effects of reality television

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programming on the attitudes and opinions of viewers and draws upon viewers' social construction of reality.

Social Construction of Reality

Based on the notion that mass media portrayals construct social reality for individuals and groups, social construction of reality plays a significant role in reality television effects research. Berger and Luckman (1966) pioneered the philosophical view that "all symbolic universes and all legitimations are human products; their existence has its base in the lives of concrete individuals, and has no empirical status apart from these lives" (p. 128). Although this philosophical assumption has been applied in many research contexts since, its relevance to this study is the connection it has with television research. Accordingly, Lang and Lang (1984), who summarize this connection in their book *Politics and Television Re-viewed*, suggested that the link between television and social construction of reality can be categorized into four major assumptions: 1) television emphasizes close-up views creating a sense of familiarity with distant people and places, 2) live event coverage gives viewers a sense of participation in public affairs, 3) television pictures seem authentic to viewers, and 4) television coverage may provide a more complete picture of the event than any other media (Lang & Lang, 1984, p. 26). It can be argued that reality television relates to these four assumptions even more than traditional television programming because of its claim of depicting and presenting reality. The act of making reality television programming is the act of constructing reality rather than illustrating reality (Tuchman, 1978).

Various studies have provided supporting evidence that television portrayals shape viewers' conceptions of reality (Flerx, Fidler, & Rogers, 1976; O'Bryant & Corder-Bolz, 1978). In fact, Bandura (2002) indicated that "to see the world as the televised messages portray it, is to harbor some misconceptions. Indeed, many of the shared misconceptions about occupational pursuits, ethnic groups, minorities, the elderly, social and sex roles, and other aspects of life are at least partly cultivated through symbolic modeling of stereotypes. Verification of persona conceptions against televised versions of social reality can thus foster some collective illusion" (p. 137).

This study proposes that if the reality television show "The Simple Life" is truly a social construction of reality for viewers, shaped by the social symbols, actors, and meanings portrayed in the show, then the implications of this show for the agricultural community could be quite significant. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the potential effects of an agriculturally based reality television show on viewers' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of agriculture.

This study investigates the potential effects of an agriculturally based reality television show on viewers' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of agriculture and was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do viewers believe agriculture was portrayed in the reality television program "The Simple Life"?

RQ2: Did the reality television program "The Simple Life" influence the perceptions and opinions of viewers toward the agriculture industry?

RQ3: Was the portrayal of agriculture in the show "The Simple Life" different for those viewers with agricultural knowledge and experiences than those viewers who lack agricultural knowledge and experiences?

Method

Because of the limited literature regarding the influence of reality television programming on the opinions and perceptions of reality for young adults, the researchers used a qualitative research design to allow for in-depth exploration into an unstudied phenomenon. Focus groups were used for data collection. Morgan (1997) describes focus groups as group interviews, although not in the sense of an alternation between a researcher's questions and the research participants' responses. Instead, the reliance is on interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher, who typically takes the role of a moderator. The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group (p. 2).

Focus groups are the sole qualitative method of data collection that allow for rich and enlightening exchanges between participants. As a result, it is through the interactions of young adult reality television viewers that the researchers sought to observe and identify how reality television programming can influence opinions and perceptions toward reality in a specific context.

Four focus groups were conducted, with each group ranging between 5 and 11 undergraduate participants. Four focus groups were chosen based on Morgan's (1997) suggestion that three to five focus groups suffice for a research project because more groups seldom provide meaningful new insights. Focus group participants were recruited from a large, undergraduate, core-curriculum course offered at a southern university. Focus group participants were provided extra credit in a departmental course as an incentive for participating in the study. College undergraduate students were selected because they represent the earliest years of the most targeted viewing audiences of reality television programming, the 18-34 years of age

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demographic (Carter, 2000). Further, these students represent an age group that may be forming generalizations and ideas about the world without the immediate contact of parents and siblings.

Two of the focus groups included participants with agricultural backgrounds and two focus groups included participants with nonagricultural backgrounds. "The Simple Life" is presented in an agricultural context; thus, the researchers were interested in comparing the responses of students from agricultural backgrounds to the responses of students from nonagricultural backgrounds. The size of each focus group, 5 to 11 students, was chosen based on the characteristics of the population under study. The focus groups were conducted in a classroom environment.

The focus groups were conducted over a four-month time period from March 2004 through July 2004. This time frame allowed the researchers to gather data from two different semesters of students, also allowing the researchers to transcribe the data between each focus group. Lindlof (1995) and Morgan (1997) recommend transcribing the data following each focus group to accurately capture the results of the focus group. The focus groups were recorded using both audio and videotape. The combination was due to the researchers' interest in capturing both verbal and nonverbal responses of the participants.

Focus group participants were first asked to complete a short survey that included several demographic questions as well as basic questions about their television viewing behaviors. The focus groups consisted of two phases. In the first, participants responded to several questions regarding their opinions, perceptions, and behaviors toward reality television programming. The second phase included a media clip from a popular, agriculturally based reality television show that aired on Fox network in the fall/winter of 2003, "The Simple Life." Following the 30-minute clip, participants were asked to respond to several questions regarding the content from "The Simple Life."

For each of the focus groups, one of the researchers served as moderator, while the other two observed the interactions and took notes on the group's conversation. Each researcher was trained and experienced in focus group moderation and observation through coursework and previous research conducted. The moderators of the focus groups opened and guided the group discussion. Moderator involvement varied depending on the facilitation needs of each group. Once the informed consent process and a short explanation of the study's procedures and purpose were reviewed, the focus group discussion began with the participants introducing themselves by sharing their name, major, hometown, and favorite television show. A

question guide was then used to facilitate participant discussion and interaction.

Audio and videotape data from each focus group was complemented by the observations and field notes made by the research team during the focus group discussions. The audiotapes were transcribed; transcripts were compared with field notes and analyzed using the inductive data analysis method outlined by Hatch (2002). All three researchers analyzed the field notes and transcripts of the focus groups.

Following analysis methods similar to other common inductive models (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Spradley, 1979; Miles & Huberman, 1994), the model of analysis used in this study searches for “patterns of meaning in data so that general statements about phenomena under investigation can be made” (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). Therefore, the inductive analysis methods utilized followed the subsequent steps: 1) read data and identify frames of analysis, 2) create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis, 3) identify salient domains and assign them a code, 4) refine salient domains and keep record of emerging relationships, 5) decide if domains are supported by data, 6) complete analysis within domains, 7) search for themes across domains, 8) outline relationships within and among domains, and 9) select data excerpts to support the relationships (Hatch, 2002). Each researcher analyzed the data following the inductive analysis procedures outline above. Following the analysis, the research team discussed emerging themes and supporting elements and identified the dominant themes that characterized the data.

Results

From the four focus groups conducted, data was gathered from 20 females and 14 males, totaling 34 participants. Fifteen participants had agricultural backgrounds and 19 participants did not. Participants with agricultural backgrounds were pursuing majors within the college of agriculture. In addition, many of them grew up working in agriculture. Participants with nonagricultural backgrounds were majoring in areas other than agriculture. Most had little knowledge of and no hands-on experience in agriculture. Results from a prefocus group survey indicated that participants watched anywhere from three to 30 hours of television per week, with the average being 11.5 hours a week. The majority of participants, 76.4% ($n = 26$), indicated that they watch a reality television program on a regular basis (at least three to four times a week).

RQ1: How do viewers believe agriculture was portrayed in the reality television program “The Simple Life”?

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Following the 30-minute exposure to the reality television show “The Simple Life,” participants were asked to provide their initial reactions to the clip. Overall, reactions varied from annoyance and frustration to offense and amusement. One participant responded by saying the show might have been funny to some people, “but I found it really offensive. Because, I mean, if you know anything about the agricultural industry, you know how hard dairy farmers work, and I think that the show made a mockery out of what dairy people do and go through.”

In contrast, another respondent shared, “Cute models playing around with some cows ... I thought it was kind of funny, personally, because like dairy cows are so like, ugh, they are so offensive.”

Although responses varied, the majority of initial responses to the clip appeared to either be extremely positive (“I found it kind of amusing. I would consider watching it.”) or extremely negative (“It frustrated me.”)

While it is important to record and identify participants’ initial reactions, the deep discussion and interaction following the exposure revealed participants’ perceptions on the portrayal of agriculture in the clip. Participants, in general, indicated that the clip they watched negatively portrayed agriculture. This portrayal of the agricultural community was described by one participant as “kind of making them look like back woods and bad.” Another participant remarked to other participants, “Do you know, like, they played the bad guys theme song whenever the farmer was coming, you kind of felt uncomfortable [as the viewer] when they did that.” Yet another respondent confirmed this portrayal, “They played like some kind of banjo type music, dingalinglingling ... the announcer had the hee-haw accent too.” The “backwoods” portrayal was described by one participant:

During the intro. to the show, they show a house without windows and a barn with bugs everywhere. It is kind of a portrayal of a lower class profession, but then you look at them and they are nicely dressed, well-spoken people, but of course viewers see more of the visuals ... the bad house, the old tractors, and the cows.

Participants also indicated that agriculture was portrayed as easy and undemanding, which most participants referred to as unrealistic. One participant offered, “I mean, working on a farm is a lot harder than what they showed.” Another participant echoed, “I spent a good amount of time on a dairy farm before and yeah, they didn’t do nearly the kind of work that it entails, they just kind of did simple farm tasks.” This sentiment was also shown in another participant’s response, “... it probably downplays it and makes it seem like, you know, there is a lot more work and a lot more that

goes into it than what they showed.” This portrayal of agriculture as simple and effortless was not directly referred to as a negative portrayal of agriculture; however, participant comments suggested that it was not an overwhelmingly positive depiction of the agricultural community.

RQ2: Did the reality television program “The Simple Life” influence the perceptions and opinions of viewers toward the agriculture community?

Even though emerging themes indicated that participants believed agriculture was negatively portrayed in the clip of “The Simple Life,” they also suggested that the show was unrealistic. Therefore, it is possible that the negative portrayal of agriculture did not resonate with viewers because of the perceived unrealistic nature of the show. The following results ascertain the influence that the portrayal of agriculture might have had on participants’ perceptions and opinions.

When asked if “The Simple Life” portrayal of agriculture influenced participants’ perceptions toward and opinions of agriculture, participants indicated that the show reinforced stereotypes about agriculture and people who work in the food and fiber industry. One participant suggested that the show “upholds what their [viewers’] perceptions are now. I mean, I know friends that say ‘Do you talk to cows?’ when I tell them I am in agricultural communication.” Another participant felt that the show “reinforces the idea that agriculture is hicks in the country.” It was clear that participants believed that although agriculture was not necessarily shown in a positive or accurate light, if anything, the agriculture context of the show reinforced viewers’ existing inaccurate perceptions and opinions toward agriculture.

Findings essentially suggest that the show might not have an influence in changing or shaping perceptions and opinions toward agriculture, but that it might have the power to support inaccurate perceptions and opinions viewers might currently hold toward agriculture. One participant observed that people do not realize how big agriculture is, what it is, where it comes from, and what it means to society. “I mean, like, it is the very first business, you could say, and people do not realize that, and they think of it as a red-neck out there mowing a field. So it [the show] doesn’t help perceptions of agriculture, let’s put it that way.”

Despite the restricted influence that participants believe “The Simple Life” may have on perceptions, examples of existing, and potentially reinforced, perceptions and opinions of agriculture emerged from participant responses. For instance, one participant referred to agriculture as “farm people that live in a population of 800 because, I mean, they may not even get the reception to watch TV there.” Another participant shared her beliefs, saying, “Most people don’t live on farms and drive ridiculously old trucks

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and live in that kind of environment; and we don't get up at 4:30 in the morning or whatever, either."

RQ3: Was the portrayal of agriculture in the show "The Simple Life" different for those viewers with agricultural knowledge and experiences than those viewers who lack agricultural knowledge and experiences?

Again, the debate over realism was the fundamental theme in all four focus groups. Participants frequently touched upon the realistic or unrealistic nature of the show's content. Seemingly, there was heightened confusion over whether this show depicted reality. In support of its realism, one student stated, "Most of it is real. I mean, you have to round up the cows, and put them in their stalls to eat, and you have to clean them before you milk them. I mean, that aspect was true."

Another participant noted, "I mean, that's their life ... I think they were just dealing with that they had to do." Like-minded and confused about reality, a participant imparted, "I think it is also like Paris and Nicky's real life. It is kind of how it is for them. I mean, it is kind of all relative ... I don't live in a small town, so I don't know what that is like, and I am not rich, either." This response not only illustrated the participant's opinion on the show's realism, but it also demonstrated that many viewers do not know what it is like to live on a farm; therefore, the portrayal of that environment on television may serve as their exposure to a life of agriculture.

Contrary to the evidence that suggested the show's content was realistic was the perception that the show was "staged." As one participant pointed out, "Maybe this was what it was like for a celebrity to work on a farm, but that's not how you gather cows." Another respondent said, "I don't think it portrays reality really. I don't think it is a good example."

Participants commonly referred to the celebrities on the show as "acting," which suggested that they believe the show is not portraying reality but rather an exaggerated version of reality. One participant commented, "They exaggerate the girls being, like, really lavish and rich and stupid, and then they kind of exaggerate the people being, like, really po-dunk and kind of like, in a really small town." Another participant said, "It is probably like, you know, such far ends of the spectrum from the general viewer of that show that it's just not very realistic."

The difference in the perceptions toward the realism of "The Simple Life" is clearly distinguished between the agricultural students and the nonagricultural students. One finding of this study was that agricultural students indicated the show was not a realistic portrayal of agriculture while nonagricultural students indicated that the show was a realistic portrayal of agriculture. One agricultural student said, "Working on a farm is a lot

harder than what they showed, and it is kind of maddening that they don't have respect for anything at all." Yet another nonagricultural student said, "The places are real, the people are real, but what happens is not really real."

The portrayal of agriculture in the show was frustrating for some of the agricultural students. They thought the show degraded the significance and contribution of agriculture to society. One student said, "They [nonagriculturalists] are amazed at the smell and sticking your hand up the cow's rear to do AI and stuff like that, which is entertaining and fun; but you also have to sit back and look at the day-to-day reality and realize that it is not all fun and games. It is hard work making a living, a very good living, that the whole nation depends on." Another agricultural student said, "I don't think that being on reality TV can convey the seriousness of agriculture, like how much the world depends on it and how big a part of the economy it is. But it does reinforce the hardworking values of the farmer." Passion for the industry and irritation toward the show was evident in the response that one agricultural student shared: "I think part of my dislike is their respect for agriculture. I mean, if I did not have that background, it may still bother me. But I think that most of my dislike is their disrespect for agriculture and that lifestyle of living ... there is nothing wrong with that, they are not better than that. You know, my family works on a strawberry farm and that is good, honest work, so that is why I think it bothers me."

Alternatively, the nonagricultural students saw "The Simple Life" as positive publicity for the agriculture community. One nonagricultural student said, "I bet they got plenty of money for it." While another suggested that if anything, "it made them [the agriculture community] look better. I don't think it made the farming or dairy industry or whatever look bad." Another student said, "I don't think it knocked agriculture in any sense."

Representing the minority perspective, yet providing an insightful, neutral comment, one participant stated, "You have to think about the public's view of agriculture; they do not think about the farmer with 5,000 head of cattle or the citrus grower with 10,000 acres. I mean, they think of the farmer who lives in a small town with all of their family within a 5-mile radius and all that kind of stuff. I mean, so of course you cannot expect a national television show to portray agriculture the way we see it. They are going to portray it as how the public sees it."

Conclusion/Discussion

In summarizing the findings from these focus groups, references can be drawn from schema theory, which emerged from the data but was not presented in the literature review. This post hoc use of theory to understand the

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data is appropriate based on the use of inductive analysis methods (Buddenbaum & Novak, 2001). Schema theory conceptualizes receivers of communication as seeking to arrive at a schema or set of schemas that decode the events or new information presented (Crockett, 1988). Schemata, or prior knowledge, are chunks of knowledge that exist in our minds and represent all that a person knows about a given concept (McKenna & Robinson, 2002; Rumelhart, 1980; Ryder & Graves, 1994; Vacca, 2002). They are often based upon prior knowledge and experiences. Schema are used for "processing new information and retrieving stored information" (Graber, 1988, p. 28).

Participants, most of whom were regular reality television viewers, were shown a clip from the reality program, "The Simple Life." They were then asked about the portrayal of agriculture in the clip from which shared themes emerged. Participants, in general, indicated that the clip negatively portrayed agriculture and reinforced stereotypes of the industry. Overall, participants shared the sentiment that the clip portrayed an unrealistic view of agriculture as easy and undemanding, giving no credence to the amount of labor and knowledge involved in producing food and fiber.

Individual reactions to the clip from the program seemed to reflect different schema regarding agriculture. Participants' responses ranged from personal offense to lighthearted amusement. Although most participants viewed the clip as unrealistic, several participants with close ties to agriculture were personally offended by the clip, while other students with limited exposure and no personal ties to agriculture viewed the clip as humorous and entertaining.

Participants were asked how "The Simple Life" might influence the perceptions and opinions of viewers toward the agriculture community. Findings suggest that while the show might not actually change perceptions of agriculture, it might support existing negative perceptions and inaccurate stereotypes toward agriculture. The perceived potential of "The Simple Life" to reinforce negative perceptions of agriculture underscored the relevance of the social construction of reality perspective. Television viewing behaviors shared by the participants indicated that they watch reality television in groups, often as a social outlet and in conjunction with evening meals. Thus, they are not only reinforcing individual perceptions of agriculture, but they are developing shared norms or group meaning about agriculture.

Finally, participants with agricultural knowledge were compared to participants without agricultural knowledge. While participants agreed that the clip was not a realistic portrayal of agriculture, participants without agricul-

tural knowledge had expected difficulty in articulating how the scenario was unrealistic. If this is not what life on a dairy farm is like, then what is it like? Further, the premise of reality may inadvertently underscore inaccurate perceptions of agriculture.

Perhaps a more disconcerting observation from the focus groups would be the apparent dichotomy and widening gap between the working class—agriculture—and the privileged class—the Hollywood celebrities. While viewers may have realized that the program did not accurately portray reality, the humor of watching two characters with no previous work experience attempting to navigate daily chores on a farm reinforced the differences between those who work in labor-intensive careers and those who do not. Viewers lacking in agriculture backgrounds demonstrated little understanding of the information and intellectual ability necessary to operate a modern farm. This lack of knowledge, however, did not affect their enjoyment of the show. This finding supports Oliver and Armstrong's (1995) research, in that viewers who enjoyed the clip the most appeared to be those whose preconceived attitudes and opinions toward the agricultural industry were reinforced through the show's content.

More research needs to be conducted to understand how perceptions of agriculture are influenced by television. Television offers inexpensive and accessible entertainment that people can consume at home (Cornog, 2005). Reality television, music videos, comedy shows, and talk shows are important sources of entertainment and information for young adults. These channels should be explored in-depth for their potential to educate the public about agriculture, or any other scientific topic rarely covered in the entertainment media. Other potential research includes looking at the portrayal of agriculture in other popular media used by young adults, including magazines and blogs.

In this study, participants without agricultural knowledge recognized that reality television is not always "real." However, considering their lack of a developed, accurate schema, the scenarios portrayed in "The Simple Life" may become part of their schema regarding agriculture. Further, once schema are created, they are difficult to change. The unrealistic portrayals of agriculture in "The Simple Life" may indeed become reality in the minds of many viewers, resulting in a distorted image of the agricultural industry.

Keywords

reality television, entertainment media, agriculture, "The Simple Life," social construction of reality

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