Selling Tradition: Impression Management and Draft Animal Agriculture of a Mississippi Farmstead

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SELLING TRADITION: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT
AND DRAFT ANIMAL AGRICULTURE OF A
MISSISSIPPI FARMSTEAD

by
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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

SELLING TRADITION: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT
AND DRAFT ANIMAL AGRICULTURE OF A
MISSISSIPPI FARMSTEAD

This thesis is a case study of a family of farmers in Mississippi’s Piney Woods who use horse-drawn equipment to grow crops. This practice is notable in the context of a larger agricultural system that prioritizes mechanization (particularly the use of tractors). The production style and their use of local direct selling via farmers markets allowed them to thrive economically because they were able to tap into a niche market of consumers desiring an alternative to the modern, conventional agricultural system.

Other literature on Alternative Food Networks (AFN) discusses the issues of alterity and appropriation—that is, whether AFN ventures are sufficiently alternative and are not simply fronts for the very institutions or global players being resisted—but does not get into how participants—producers in particular—might utilize impression management strategies to convince others that they are sufficiently alternative. The family in question used narrative, rhetoric, and space to convince others that they carried alterity and also that they were traditional; the spaces they constructed on their property, which included a general store, gave visitors the impression of a restoration of the past. Both impression management and nostalgia played into what I call the traditional–modern framework, a conceptional arena that allowed participants to reflect their sense of identity and ideology.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

After working at a Texas ranch for three years, James Vardaman returned to his Mississippi home with a team of horses and a drive to use them.

James had grown up fascinated with work horses. In high school, he had farmed with teams of horses, working on the land with horse-drawn equipment to grow crops and then selling the produce. He had sought out others who also worked with horses, people who shared their techniques and their philosophy about animals. But, once he graduated from high school, he had stopped working with draft horses. He studied animal science at Mississippi State University and then bounced around the country working various jobs. He still had horses, he still used horses, and continued to learn about them, but he was not farming with them.

It was only after working at the ranch in Texas, when he helped his boss buy a team of horses, that James’s passion resurfaced. In the late 2000s, he bought a team of his own and transported them back to his Mississippi home. He presented the horses to his mother and father and said he wanted to farm with them.

James and his parents, Chelsea and Henry, already had the land for it: a 40-acre pecan orchard where they had been holding an annual festival since 1986, when he was still in high school. The Festival was a growing economic event in their town, modeled after an “old timey” county fair. It often evoked feelings of nostalgia among festivalgoers and Chelsea grew excited at the idea of horse-drawn farming displays, which would be easy to tie in to the Festival because of how they reminded people of the way farming used to be.
But James wanted more than a show. Farming with a team of horses would allow him to have a job he really enjoyed. So many people hate their jobs, slogging through the work week and then trying to compress their real lives into short weekends. Farming was its own reward to James. So, for it to be worthwhile, it had to be real.

“I’d like to have a farm,” he said to them. “Not just a petting zoo. I’d like to have a farm.”

If James was going to farm, they all were; their decades of work with the Festival had gotten them used to sharing in profits and losses. The farm became a reality for them, and they found it rewarding to sell their produce at local farmers markets in nearby Hattiesburg and Laurel. After a few years of this, they expanded their shared enterprise and opened up Vardaman’s General Store on their property where they sold hard-to-find bulk items and served lunches each day. In addition to continuing to run the annual Festival, they also started up a Christmas in the Orchard event each December and began running periodic “living history” tours for schoolchildren. These activities each reflected the Vardamans’ sense of who they were and how best to do things, though it was clear that they would not have participated if there were not also long-term economic benefits.

The effort to work together as a family turned James and his parents into a full-time economic unit. Because they recognized their individual strengths and interests, they took on informal roles that allowed them to complement each other.

James was most knowledgeable about animals and did the most to work with them and make sure they were taken care of. When the workload was too much for James and his parents, they would recruit high school age boys to help out, and James was normally
their immediate boss. He was also a youth minister and was often playful when he interacted with teenage boys, poking at or teasing them.

Henry grew up in a family of sharecroppers and so he helped with the upkeep of the land and fed the animals. He was retired by this time, having worked several decades for a local power company, and he treated the farm as part of his retirement. He was soft-spoken and easygoing so that he mostly went along with the plans that James and Chelsea made, although he was not afraid to voice his opinion when he felt they were not being practical.

When Chelsea helped with the farming, it was usually to pick produce. Otherwise, she ran the store, doing the administrative paperwork to make sure it was well-stocked and working with the cooks she had hired to determine what to serve for lunch each day. She took a major role in putting out promotional materials, as well as advertising for the store and the Festival in various magazines. She also began orchestrating living history tours on their property as an educational tool for school children. While she had a strong presence in the store, she often left it to Henry or James to sit and visit with guests. “I am not a people person,” she said to me. “Henry will stand and talk to people for hours, and I just don’t have the patience for that.”

In addition to allowing them to act as an economic unit, these activities—particularly growing crops and then selling them at local farmers markets—allowed their farm to become an accessway into a community of people seeking an alternative to the contemporary mainstream food system. This is what drew me to the Vardaman family. I came to Mississippi from California and began a long, drawn-out process of getting to know James and his family enough to write about them. I am not a rural Southerner and,
with my small frame, pale skin, and horn-rimmed glasses, look more like a bookish intellectual than a farmer; it was easy to see me as an outsider, a detached west-coast liberal unable to appreciate the ways of a country farm deep in Mississippi’s Pine Belt. But it was also apparent that I was serious about understanding the Vardamans. Over time, I developed a relationship with them so that they felt comfortable with me enough to drop their guard and open up.

In order to see the relevance of the Vardamans’ activities, it is important to understand the context in which they acted. A review on existant literature covering the search for alternative, sustainable foods shows that communities seeking such alternatives are a source of both confusion and concern for scholars. The growing body of such alternatives complicates the meta-narratives assuming continuing globalization, as they act as a form of resistance that is also under the threat of being swallowed up by the very forces being resisted (Kirwan 2004). By participating in farmers markets, the Vardamans situated themselves within a community of those desiring this sort of alterity, and the review in the next chapter is designed to show what was at stake for the Vardaman family.

For the most part, however, literature on these communities tends to gloss over the meaning that people make from their surroundings and those they interact with. For the Vardamans, a big part of this was a sense of a return to lost lifeways. With visitors coming each day for lunch, there were many opportunities for them to see James working with the horses. He welcomed the community, often stopping to greet people he knew. He had no problem with them standing at the edge of the field, holding a Styrofoam cup of sweet tea, and watching him move the horses back and forth, disksing the soil or
spreading fertilizer. These visitors, primed by the store’s food, the rocking chairs on its patio, the horses, the music, and the collection of antiques lying around the farm, had the tendency to see the past come alive with James and his horses. They often assumed that this was why the Vardamans farmed the way they did, to bring the past back. But this was not the case for James.

He explained it to me one day as he forked bedding made from corn stalks into a horse stall. He wiped his brow and said that, on one of the last days at the Texas ranch, the river had risen and flooded a whole pasture so he had to rescue cattle that had gotten isolated. He had had a dog that he worked with then and, at the moment he was wading on a horse across this flooded river, his dog came swimming by and he thought to himself, *you probably won’t ever have a job like this again.*

But, every once in a while, he would have similarly inspiring moments of beauty on his farm. He had be working with the horses out in the field, and it would just click. Suddenly, he would understand something new that he could only have learned from working behind the horses. It was a private joy, something that he got on his own that he could not buy and he could not get someone to do for him. These, he said, were the moments that made it worthwhile for him.

“It’s a craft,” he said, dropping another forkful of bedding into the stall and then putting the pitchfork back on its rack. “It really is. You’ve got to be very intuitive. You’ve got to be very sensitive. It’s something you learn. And I think that, more than anything, is what drives me to it.”

This is a case study, a look at impression management and how it relates to the economic vitality of one specific family of small-scale producers in Mississippi. The
Vardamans came to appeal to those who appreciated how they evoked the past, as well as those desiring alternative producers—two groups who were not necessarily mutually exclusive from each other. In this sense, they thrived when they successfully triggered feelings of nostalgia and/or demonstrated that they were the kind of producers worth buying from at local farmers markets. In subsequent chapters, I use Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical model of interaction as a lens to describe the Vardamans’ use of impression management, focusing on face-to-face interaction and space at farmers markets (chapter IV) as well as their other agritourism events (Chapter V). The Vardaman family members married their economic activities with a self-image that was managed by the interplay of their cultural beliefs and their use of spaces. The use of narrative, rhetoric, and architecture to present a positive image stemmed from the economic need in the context of conventional markets that would otherwise drive them out, as well as their values and sense of themselves.

It matters that the Vardamans are a family living in a rural part of the American South because there is very little literature on Southern farmers in the context of alternative foodways. Using draft horses to grow food was a reminder to many visitors of former lifeways; this was a strong reminder for this community because draft animal farming and all its trappings existed within the living memory of many rural Southerners as a prominent part of life. This use of “traditional” ways served as a trigger for feelings of nostalgia. At the same time, a growing body of consumers, stereotypically liberal or progressive, would find the Vardaman farmers market booth in their search of an alternative that was more sustainable, better quality, or more ethical than the modern, conventional food system. The spaces that they constructed came with constant
maintenance of a sense of authenticity, both in the sense that they were a sustainable alternative to conventional producers and that they had accessed something lost from the past. This desire for authenticity also relates to the sixth chapter, an exploration of the concept of modernity in relation to the Vardamans’ practices. This exploration centers largely around a rhetorical arena in which they balanced two competing interests: how to be traditional while also thriving economically in a competitive contemporary world.

It is not enough to say that there was a desire among participants to visit or draw from the traditional because they felt that their modern lifestyle was less authentic. As it will be shown in later chapters, concepts like authenticity, tradition, and modernity are culturally loaded. Thus, for example, something manmade can be considered “natural,” and things that are a mixture of modern and traditional are still placed into one category or another. People’s desire to draw from the traditional to experience a more authentic lifestyle can gain greater clarity with an understanding that these concepts are socially constructed.

An exploration of cultural ideas fits well within the realm of anthropological inquiry, although my experience with the Vardamans has perhaps been a bit unorthodox for an anthropologist. The stereotype of anthropology is that an ethnographer goes off someplace in the world and lives with an uncontacted or isolated non-Western group for several years before he returns and writes an ethnographic account of their ways. Having learned their language and their customs, he takes on the role (augmented by his academic credentials) of intercultural intermediary, and his ethnographic account becomes the definitive, authoritative word on the culture.
However, particularly with reflexive ethnographic writing, the field is much more diverse than this cliché. My own experience with the Vardamans has certainly been different from this stereotype. The most obvious difference is that the subject of my ethnographic account is of a Western group living in the United States. Being a white, middle class Californian, my own cultural background has a lot in common with theirs. These similarities were the backdrop upon which differences could be appreciated.

For example, I have some familiarity with Protestant Christianity, as I grew up attending a nondenominational Protestant church each Sunday; this gave me a set of expectations for when I attended services at the Vardamans’ Pentecostal church. When Chelsea asked me what my take on her church was, I mentioned that the practice of group prayer—that is, where everybody in the congregation prayed out loud and at the same time, creating a chaotic hum so garbled that each prayer was, in a sense, private—was different from my own experiences where the church leader would pray for the congregation.

She nodded, as though she was aware of that distinction. “I don’t know why we do that. It’s not biblical.”

In this instance, my own cultural upbringing allowed me to provide an answer that fit with Christianity as she viewed it. It also allowed us to understand the differences in each other’s perspectives more easily. Were I a Muslim or the Vardamans Buddhists, that same sort of shared understanding would have taken much longer to achieve.

There were also notable differences between myself and the Vardamans that we were already familiar with. For example, while the Vardamans identified as politically conservative, they still had an understanding of more liberal or progressive people such
as myself. Political discussions, when they did occur, did not carry any sense of surprise over the beliefs of the other, as we had already been exposed to each other’s perspectives. In other words, although we were different politically, the differences were within our respective spheres of understanding.

Having many similarities can also have its drawbacks, particularly when negative transfer prompts a researcher to overlook subtle differences between his or her own culture and that of the subject. The most prominent example of this in my research was kinship. In my own background, connections with extended family are maintained through intermittent contact. One may live across the state from a grandmother, but still feel connected with periodic visits during holidays. I had initially assumed that the Vardamans were similar, but eventually realized that many in their community prioritized involvement with their extended families. I had missed this, in part, because the term that describes this, *family-oriented*, seemed close to a similar term from my own background—*family friendly*—that refers to exhibiting wholesome values. Thus, when the Festival was described as a “family-oriented event,” I had assumed it meant that its character and focus involved a certain amount of purity so that conservative Christians could feel comfortable bringing their children. With the newer understanding of *family-oriented*, however, this characterization seems more in line with the notion that the Festival could help bring families together, particularly more distantly connected family members.

Not everyone in the Vardamans’ community perfectly shared this conception of family-orientedness, though it was apparent that those who did were the most drawn to them. One friend of the Vardamans, a woman from New Orleans, explained what being
family-oriented meant to her by reflecting on her husband’s surprise at all the birthdays they were celebrating.

“You mean we have to get gifts for all your cousins?” he had said.

“All of them,” she said.

It was clear that the Vardamans were family-oriented in this way. Several of Henry’s siblings went to their same church. One of James’s two brothers, although living out-of-state, visited every Saturday to work on the house he was building for himself right next to the Vardaman farmstead. It was also apparent that their store worked to enhance the family connections. One of Henry’s sisters worked alongside Chelsea in the store every day, and other family members made periodic visits to eat at the store or even play music. By the time I went to a Vardaman family reunion, I had already met most of those in attendance multiple times.

The importance granted to kinship also influenced the Vardamans’ economic decisions, as they expressed their family-oriented nature with their desire to work together as a family. When James brought that first team of horses home, he and his parents had already been in business putting on the Festival together for over two decades, and they had been discussing how they could create “an environment where we could work together as a family and that we could support ourselves.”

During my time with the Vardamans, those in their community showed that they viewed themselves as markedly distinct from myself because of their identification with the American South. People occasionally implied the belief that outsiders might have a negative attitude about Southern ways. When I would reveal where I was from, people often remarked that I must have “culture shock” and asked with surprise why I would
choose to move from California to Mississippi, as if the area would have little value to non-Southerners. One woman, when she found out I was from California, asked if I thought people talked funny in Mississippi; she seemed almost embarrassed by how those outside the South might perceive her speech and her behavior and said she preferred to keep silent when she was around too many non-Southerners.

This mixed attitude about Southern identity informed my decision to pick up the language, so to speak; I conformed linguistically by adopting what people called a “country” accent when I was on-site. In my experience, attitudes about Southern dialects are often negative, even among some Southerners. Although quite a few of those in the Vardaman community embraced their rural speech, my decision to conform linguistically was based on the assumption that failing to do so would undermine my attempts at rapport-building by making me seem more like a condescending outsider.

These comparisons between myself and the Vardamans are relevant to the sense of self that they portrayed, a self that they shared with others and might be simply referred to as “country.” Although a basic definition of this term might stop with a reference to rurality or distance from larger cities, there are clear connotations that go beyond that.

“Let me tell you how rural we are,” Chelsea once said to me, pulling out of the post office parking lot. “Or country. I love country.”

I was riding with her in her Volkswagen Beetle on her way to church. As she turned onto the street, a black man walking down the street waved at her. She waved back.

“He’s high as a kite,” she said, laughing.
I looked at him for a sign of intoxication. He was holding a cup.

“How do you know?”

“How from living in town,” she said. “He’s a great guy, besides the drinking and smoking dope.”

In a small town, she said, everybody knows each other, and everybody takes care of each other.

As the distance between us and her church decreased, Chelsea told the story of a plastic bag of pears she saw one day outside of a store. They were on a chair with a handwritten sign that said, “I have too many pears. Take them. They’re free.” She beamed at this, an example that showed how she and everyone around her were country. But she did not explain what it was that stood out to her. Was it because it involved someone doing their own growing? Was it the trust and spirit of giving involved in donating them to whoever wanted them? Maybe there was also something to the store managers who did not mind the bag being there. Maybe it was important that the setup was so informal, bypassing regulatory frameworks and large-scale operations.

It could have been all of these things, or none of them. But I thought afterwards that the moment with the man on the street was a more telling example of what it means to be country. Everybody knows each other, and everybody takes care of each other. This was an impression about the distinction between urban and rural that the Vardamans’ community carried with it. Country life, it seemed, involved people spread out from each other but still intimately connected. Urban communities, in their conception, are less generous, and are missing direct, personal connections. This understanding of country life echoed their identity as Southerners in that they viewed it as a distinguishing
characteristic. This is what seems to have prompted Chelsea to share with me how

country she was in the first place.

Being country also involves a connection to nature, a connection less palpable in

more urban areas. Although farming is a human activity, the experience can feel very

natural. Farm work puts people outside, where they can smell the trees and the dirt, hear

the animals, and feel the sun and wind. The dependence on favorable weather can also

drive the feeling of connection with nature. When James’s work as a minister put him in

Cleveland for several months, the one thing he said that made it bearable was a job that

allowed him to work in the soil. He could be gone for a while, he said, but he always had

to return to it because he was a “country boy.”

While I may have initially been seen as an urbanite—since I lived in Hattiesburg

and come from a city ten times as large—my ability to adjust to farm life allowed the

Vardamans to dissociate me from the stereotypes they had about such people.

“I like you, Matthew,” Chelsea once said to me as she and I ate lunch. “You

should come live with us, away from all those mean people.”

“What do you mean by ‘mean people?’”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged, as if it was a turn of phrase or a clichéd idea about
city life. Henry, who was sitting with us, put turnip greens and pickled peppers on his

corn bread. I looked at him.

“That’s how country folk do it,” he said.

The above aspects of their identity are relevant to this thesis because they

permeated all of their economic activities and because their projected self reflected social

values that they preferred to be associated with. Being conservative means valuing
practices that have been lost or are under threat, which plays right into appealing to the past. In addition to tapping into this broader theme of nostalgia, the general store was designed to nurture the community connections that the Vardamans saw as important. The use of horses and vending at farmers markets also reminded people of former lifeways as they were slow-paced and showed a more intimate connection to nature than using tractors would.

The Role of the Anthropologist

Bernard (2006) says that anthropologists are more likely nowadays to study groups in the United States than elsewhere. I believe that placing those with closer geographic and cultural proximity within the purview of ethnographic inquiry strengthens the field. The deepest questions that anthropologists explore cannot be fully answered if we focus more on marginalized or non-Western groups. The stereotype of anthropology above feeds into the notion that subjects of ethnographic inquiry are prototypically “primitive” or otherwise distinctive in ways that justify marginalization; unseating this stereotype assists in combating this form of othering.

This outlook on the place of anthropology in studying Western groups is related to my stance on the role of the researcher in relation to those being researched. I believe that the researcher’s role is to learn about people and represent them (be it in writing, as is the case here, or through other media) in a way that closely resembles their own views. This representation should be recognizable to the study’s participants and also be a clear “translation” of such ways so that non-participants can still understand the cultural meanings (Spradley 1980). In this sense, the anthropologist is doing more than just studying people who do not have time to write about themselves; he is also using
academic language and framing to provide an anthropological context that effectively communicates these cultural meanings to a wider audience, be they a more general audience or a narrower one of other scholars. The question of the role of the researcher, as well as other aspects of the relationship between the researcher and those whose lifeways are being described, impacts how research is conducted. A researcher’s data collection and analyses reflect an underlying paradigm about social reality and the third chapter goes over my research methodology in detail, showing that my constructivist paradigm has led me to a fairly inductive approach that builds up from my data.

A constructivist paradigm is closely aligned to what is called “reflexive anthropology.” Clifford (2010) articulates the dynamic of reflexive anthropology in the oxymoronic claim that ethnographic representations are true fictions in the sense that the truths that come from them are generated from the ethnographic inquiry; that these truths are constructed means that they are inherently incomplete. Related to this, Lawless (1992) emphasizes the dialogic nature of reflexive ethnographic research by arguing that such an approach works to “illuminate the biases and preconceptions that inform our interpretations” so that the researcher is oriented around fostering “a new authentication of a multivocal kind of ethnography” where one interpretation is not necessarily privileged over any others (1992:302). From Clifford (2010) and Lawless (1992), we can see that ethnographic representations are not sealed off from critique; an orientation towards reflexivity thus guides an approach that opens the door to accountability to the people being written about, as well as to readers. This approach also exposes the wrinkles of representation as it works to uproot the intellectual privilege given to the researcher; I am one of many expressive beings capable of analysis, subject to my own biases, and
positioned within a larger academic conversation that will continue on after this work. The chapters that follow are thus one link in a long chain of an ever-expanding, ever-refining dialogue among people who attempt to see through the eyes of another.
A growing body of research has focused on what are called Alternative Food Networks (AFN); these form a binary with conventional food networks as the latter involves mechanized production and processing, practices that can often compromise the environment and the safety of food, and supply chains that disconnect producers and consumers as they stretch across the globe. Kloppenburg (2004) points to dissatisfaction with the conventional food system—particularly the tampering of crops at the molecular level to directly alter their genetic characteristics and to the association of this practice with potentially harmful industrial-strength pesticides and herbicides—as the source of a growing search for alternatives in the last two decades, organic food being the most prominent example. However, AFNs carry an existential risk. Kirwan (2004) frames the issue as one of alterity and appropriation. Alterity within food systems involves actors’ intent to create “an alternative system of food production and distribution that is not based exclusively on the commodity relationship and profit maximization” (Kirwan 2004:398). Appropriation, on the other hand, involves the extraction of commercial value from these niche markets by powerful actors operating at the globalized levels that such systems were originally designed to circumvent. AFNs are thus constantly at risk of incorporation into the structures of the conventional food system.

The changes in the organic movement reflect this risk, as many agree that it has been appropriated by conventional agriculture in ways that undermine its alterity. Goodman (1999) attributes this to the organic labeling process of the 1990s, which involved a regulatory framework that imposed a controversial meaning of the term
organic in the foundation of an official labeling and certification system, one that many activists felt was a “restrictive, highly technocentric vision, focusing on permitted inputs rather than agro-ecological processes or the socio-economic dimensions of sustainable agriculture” (1999:31). This appropriation has resulted in a situation where contemporary organic agriculture is often set up in ways that mimic conventional agriculture, replicating its practices and organization and thereby failing to live up to the organic movement’s foundational ideals, as well as the expectations of conscientious consumers (Jarosz 2008). Unlike Goodman, Jarosz attributes this situation to “market competition, geophysical and climatic differences, crop specificities and technologies” (2008:233). Whatever the cause, organic production has become a system where synthetic inputs are replaced with permissible (usually biological) alternatives; this system is arguably environmentally beneficial but does nothing to address other problems of conventional agriculture that are worth challenging (Lockie 2009). Pollan (2006) even refers to this as an “industrial organic” infrastructure that violates the original intent of the founders of the organic movement, a wolf in sheep’s clothing that only seems to maintain its alterity so that consumers will feel that they are eating conscientiously.

Because of this risk of appropriation, scholars seeking to define AFNs have tried to identify the features of alterity. The tendency that many scholars share when defining AFNs is a focus on what they are not, rather than what they are. For example, Jarosz (2008) defines them as having four features: 1) shorter supply chains, bypassing intermediaries; 2) smaller farms—typically fewer than fifty acres—using organic or holistic methods; 3) exchanges that avoid supermarkets and aseasonal foods, such as at farmers markets or with community supported agriculture (CSA); and 4) ideological
support of sustainable food systems. Each of these four items reflects opposition to conventional agriculture.

In an attempt to provide a more positive list, Morgan et al. (2006) put forth three attributes: 1) a redistribution of value to farmers, 2) a reestablishment of producer–consumer trust, and 3) a discourse context regarding new forms of political association and market governance. However, Follett (2009) questions the actual alterity of AFNs when viewed along these criteria. He notes that these are not necessary and proper attributes to phenomena studied in the AFN literature as many things designated as AFNs fail to fully measure up. In this sense, organic production methods could still be considered AFNs by both participants and scholars, even if they do not actually redistribute value to farmers. Venn et al. (2006) are similarly skeptical, characterizing the broad generalizations of AFNs present in the literature as overly idealistic, with relevant case studies failing to accurately fit these generalizations. Rather than provide an outright definition, they identify four parameters that academics seem to use in selecting practices for study within the AFN literature: 1) new economic spaces created for the purpose of reconnecting consumers with producers and re-embedding production and consumption; 2) distribution networks detached from normal (corporate controlled) food chains; 3) the promotion of “quality” that can involve attempts to preserve a particular tradition or heritage; and 4) socially-embedded principles of trust, community, and localness.

This final element of the principles of alterity (or, the discourse element of Morgan et al. 2006) is worth exploring in further detail because of its relationship to appropriation. Follett notes that discourse and principles do not amount to an actual
reconstitution of how things are done, though I think he may be missing the importance of how idealization reveals the meaning behind behavior. While Follett is correct in interrogating how revolutionary AFNs really are, as discourse alone would not amount to something separate from the conventional food system, this discourse can help guide participants into considering what sorts of goals are appropriate so that they can be oriented to respond to new phenomena and evaluate how successful they are at avoiding problematic characteristics of the conventional food system. That participants are deliberately seeking alterity also seems an important feature, and it may be that the combination of this discourse with the other attributes (or, at least, the attempts at them) helps mark AFNs as distinct. This discourse may also help act as a buffer to appropriation, as it helps guide participants into resisting compromises that undermine their principles. Venn et al. (2006) note that there is variation in whether an AFN activity’s ideological character is foundational or adopted later, which means that people may be seeking an alternative without having an articulate reason why.

Maxey (2006) argues that sustainability is a lens in which scholars may address how the ideological framework that backs up the conventional food system is broken down with AFNs. Sustainability, he says, is a process (rather than a feature) that is held up by socio-cultural, economic, and environmental pillars. Focusing on just the economic pillar is characteristic of the more neoliberal state of affairs. Similarly, Follett (2009) argues that AFNs that focus on the environment and neglect social or political concerns are still part of the distanciated, globalized market characteristic of conventional food systems. When we also consider the primarily socio-cultural character of the attributes provided by Morgan et al. (2006) above, we can see that both scholars and
participants may potentially neglect parts of Maxey’s three-tiered analysis of sustainability. Viewing organic food from this lens, Starr et al. (2003) argue that sustainable production should involve reliance on near-farm inputs. Since the production of organic food simply emphasizes external inputs of a different kind and is neutral to the issue of mechanization, it is not sustainable and, therefore, has lost its alterity so that it is both processed and undifferentiated as much as non-organic products.

Careful Consumption

As Fish et al. (2006) point out, there are no “value-free conceptions of sustainable agriculture” despite scholarly attempts at reifying one particular conception into something objective or neutral (2006:186). This means that these articulations of alterity and sustainability are not necessarily shared by AFN participants. As participants can define the situation for themselves, the ways they do so reflect the ideological characteristics of the AFNs they participate in. While scholars may see the risk of appropriation, it does not necessarily follow that the participants themselves do. Jarosz (2008) points out that the efforts to create a sustainable system include not only production and distribution, but also consumption behaviors. These efforts can also involve changes in the relationship between producers and consumers. One ubiquitous approach among AFN participants (as well as many scholars) is neoliberalism, a political ideology that seeks a restoration of a market free from government intervention, with all the trappings of laissez-faire capitalism that come with it, as well as a post-Fordist emphasis on production flexibility and a belief in governmental incompetence (Potter and Tilzey 2005, Troughton 2005).
The popularity of neoliberalism with food systems comes from a belief that both government and science have been compromised by their role in fashioning the new intrinsic risks present in conventional agriculture—particularly those related to health and the environment—so that certain consumers have taken to relying on their own judgments and using their purchasing power to effect market changes, something Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) call “careful consumption” (2000:285). These conscientious consumers can still be influenced by the policies of both government and business. As Lockie puts it, “consumption practices are not pre-given phenomena to which retailers and others passively respond…” (2009:194).

As an example of intervention on the behavior of consumers, Lockie points to agricultural policy changes in Australia that have shifted from subsidizing risk to neoliberal policies that protect property rights, promote farmers’ abilities to make their own business and environmental plans, address problems like land or water degradation through local-regional cooperation, and shift the burden of food safety onto the consumer–producer/entrepreneur relationship (Lockie 2009). This modified set of roles implicitly alters consumers’ behavior, as it calls upon what he refers to as “citizen-consumers” to be responsible, self-governing agents in a larger political framework of deregulation and reduced public services. Thompson (2004) also points out another way in which the consumption behaviors of these conscientious neoliberals can be influenced, pointing to magazine advertisements of health products that use a metadiagnosis of separation from nature as the cause of medical ills and doing so in a way that reinforces a kind of alternative do-it-yourself healthcare dependent on consuming fetishized, branded products to make up for failures in maintaining purity from toxic chemicals in modern
foods. So it seems that neoliberal thinking works as a response to both the problems of conventional agriculture and the risk of appropriation.

Fish et al. (2006) position neoliberalism within a larger context of agricultural restructuring. Discourse on Alternative Food Networks projects further changes regarding the power structures that influence agriculture; with government support of conventional agriculture, the neoliberal agenda of a government rollback is on the table as long as it can be reconciled with projected notions of sustainable agriculture and other forms of sustainable development. In the sense that AFNs can be characterized as chartering an alternative economic sense through shorter supply chains and newly inspired trust between consumers and producers, Fish et al. see them as consistent with a neoliberal conception of sustainable development. It might then seem that a neoliberal approach with its citizen-consumers and careful consumption would provide both sustainable alterity and resistance to appropriation. However, Fish et al. also concede that shared goals of sustainable development “may not be adequately secured through unfettered free trade” (2006:184), making a purely neoliberal approach unlikely to be effective. Lockie (2009) makes the case that AFN scholars and participants use neoliberal rhetoric or frameworks in the process of making the case against government protectionism of conventional agriculture. Lockie thus augments Fish et al.’s point in assuming that long-standing government support of conventional food systems would require more than just free market neutrality. In that sense, it is not so much that sustainable agriculture could never be secured in a free trade environment but that a counterbalance to longstanding state support of conventional agribusiness would be necessary for a fair shake at sustainable agriculture.
Still, the neoliberal approach has other problems in regard to sustainable agriculture. For example, neoliberal models may be missing important parts of the theoretical picture. Lockie (2009) argues that, because the idea of the “rational” consumer is empirically false (with favored entrepreneurs untowardly manipulating the system in their favor), a neoliberal system would fail without access to proper informational resources that would show participants how to fully utilize their power as citizen-consumers. One particularly common characterization of sustainability, which Fish et al. (2006) attribute to neoliberalism, is that it is a good that is prepared and delivered to consumers for purchase. They characterize this as a potentially false and harmful reification that, although pragmatically and rhetorically appealing to those who use it, acts to reinforce “political and cultural discourses that have propagated the use of such terminology” to the exclusion of “other moral registers surrounding the idea of sustainable agriculture” (such as those mentioned by Maxey above) that see the environment as something more than just part of the economic system (Fish et al. 2006:184).

Neoliberal thinking is also at the heart of some of the problems that have prompted searches for alternatives. Goodman (1999) points out that the global sense of uncertainty from the mad cow scare of the 1980s—a foundational food scare for the AFN movement—was exacerbated by neoliberal deregulation policies that indirectly contributed to the unhealthy production and processing standards that caused an outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. If neoliberal policies were the cause of the worst aspects of conventional agriculture, then it would not make much sense to argue for more neoliberalism as a response.
Most importantly, neoliberalism may undermine the very goals it sets for itself. A number of scholars have pointed out the problematic connection between neoliberalism and constraints on political activism. Lockie (2009) says that neoliberalism relegates political participation to the local while social and economic relationships extending to the rest of the globe are “reduced to a depoliticized arena of personal consumption choices” (2009:196). DuPuis and Goodman (2005) see the neoliberal global logic played out in what is called “glocalization” where the state is hollowed out while subnational and global levels of power gain prominence. They warn that this could undermine long-standing, popular governmental protections against corporate abuses present at the national level. In an arena with large-scale, global corporations acting in an unrestrained fashion, DuPuis and Goodman do not see power as being localized so much as relocalization simply becoming a new, potentially appropriated face in the service of large global interests while it plays on “left ideals of political participation and right ideals of non-interference in markets” (DuPuis and Goodman 2005:368). Rather than be an answer to conventional food systems, appropriation via neoliberal glocalization would exacerbate the problems of conventional agriculture. Watts et al. (2005) and Troughton (2005) both argue that neoliberal model approaches have already acted to help create both oligarchies and oligopolies at a global scale so that the conventional agricultural system goes unchallenged in any meaningful way. Major agribusiness players have consolidated the different parts of the agricultural system and comprehensively integrated commodity chains; thus, rather than a “post-Fordist” emphasis on production flexibility and labor-management relations—a key part of the neoliberal model—oligopololistic tendencies continue with agricultural machinery, chemicals (e.g., fertilizers, herbicides), and
genetically-modified seed stock each being manufactured and sold by just a handful of large corporations so that the neoliberal trends are likely to do nothing to challenge the entrenched problems of conventional agriculture (Troughton 2005).

Farmers Markets

The relevance of farmers markets in the context of alterity and appropriation becomes apparent when we begin to unseat the binaries inherent in discourse on AFNs. As I mention above, scholars and participants typically think in terms of either-or when it comes to articulating the ideologies or goals of different food systems. Thus, local contrasts with global and conventional contrasts with terms like local, organic, or sustainable. However, as Hinrichs (2003) points out, this usage is more a matter of convenience, as the binaries they offer are oversimplistic shorthand in articulating and addressing extremely complex problems related to the environment and energy impact (Hinrichs 2003 provides a table expanding on this complexity). Follett (2009) unpacks the conceptual AFN–conventional binary by arguing for a continuum between strong AFNs that feature producers and consumers de-prioritizing price and efficiency and weaker ones that are more similar to conventional systems.

Venn et al. (2006) do a better job of articulating distinctions among AFNs, creating four subcategories relative to the degree of connection between consumers and producers. These include producers as consumers (e.g., community gardens, community food cooperatives), featuring consumers acting out their own food network strategies in ways that potentially undermine the idea that consumers are passive recipients of the networks they are involved in; direct producer-consumer partnerships (e.g., community supported agriculture), which mark a shift in consumer engagement, particularly as close
producer-consumer relationships lead to shared risks; direct-sell (e.g., farmers markets, farm gate sales, adoption/rental schemes, mobile food shops, box schemes, producer cooperatives), with consumers dealing directly with producers in person or through the Internet and personally evaluating production; and specialist retailers (e.g., online grocers, specialist wholesalers, tourist attractions), with consumers having little direct contact with producers, though retailers act as intermediaries to concerned consumers by making supply decisions based on production and connecting products with information on methods so that consumers can feel more connected to producers (Venn et al. 2006). In this scheme, farmers markets are more modest resistances to conventional agricultural systems compared to, for example, community gardens that do not divide participants into distinct producers and consumers (Lockie 2009). Hinrichs (2003) points out that farmers markets—along with CSAs—foster connections between producers and consumers, though farmers markets have designated spaces designed to effect in-person connections (often at the point of sale) while CSAs are based on more long-term partnerships.

Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) argue that farmers markets are a part of the use of locality as a form of careful consumption. They are set up as spaces where local producers sell their own produce directly to members of the public (Archer et al. 2003), and a common requirement of farmers markets is that the products sold should somehow be produced, grown, caught, cooked, or processed by the stallholder. A caveat from this comes from Holloway and Kneafsey (2000), who note that vendors of UK farmers markets may also include knowledgeable employees; this might seem like it could pave the way towards appropriation by violating the concept of direct selling, though there is
no indication that the effect of evoking “raw capitalism” is any different when it is a producer’s family member or employee. Kirwan (2004) says that producers in the UK who utilized employees this way were able to sell at more markets but suggests that this would not necessarily undermine the ethic of locality and direct selling inherent to farmers markets; the face-to-face nature of interaction at farmers markets builds up more personalized and long-term relationships so that, even though these relationships are primarily economic in nature, they go beyond the point of sale. Because consumers and producers appreciate the alterity of farmers markets that stems from local and social embeddedness, it seems unlikely that this use of employees at farmers markets would be the first step in a greatly extended network of farmers markets because of the stigma against non-locality and the appearance of appropriation that it would entail.

The unfiltered connections between consumers and producers inherent in direct selling allows for a sort of interrogation about production methods. These customers, particularly newer ones, use the ability to directly question producers (or knowledgeable employees) as an important method in determining quality, which both creates relationships and answers questions about production methods. In these contexts, trust in the product is integrated with social relationships, forming a sort of mutual loyalty that develops in a style that evokes notions of “old-fashioned service” (Kirwan 2004:404). Part of the way farmers markets accomplish this is through a setup of expectations. Consumers tend to perceive farmers markets as the source of idealized qualities not found at supermarkets, usually relating quality to localness and naturalness, as well as other features like freshness and taste (Kirwan 2004, Archer et al. 2003).
There is a darker side to the association with quality, as Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) point out that the higher prices of farmers market goods challenge their role as alternatives to the conventional food system. By being more expensive, farmers markets may not make economic sense to those with tight budgets. Goodman (2004) characterizes this as a risk to sustainable alterity. As he puts it, the AFN notions of quality, organic, natural, sustainable, and local are elitist by their association with prices limited to those with middle- and upper-level incomes; meanwhile, the industrialized, processed foods of the conventional food system are “democratizing” by virtue of being available to anyone. In this sense, those unable to “secure access to safe, nutritious food are the missing guests at the table” of an alternative food system (Goodman 2004:13).

Soper (2007) makes a related point but focuses on the very idea of the conscientious citizen-consumer. She challenges the assumption that it is an empowerment of citizens into consumers and suggests that a system that relies on people making ethical choices with their purchasing power could instead be designed to cover the problems of deregulation and privatization like reduced choice and unequal access to public resources. Soper also points out that these supposed citizen-consumers may still be acting out of self-interest, rather than acting altruistically; if, as Goodman suggests, the association of ethical consumer choices is something done at the expense of reduced price for one’s consumption to fit their personal conscience, this may simply reflect “shifts in consumer thinking” about desirable lifeways (Soper 2007). It is these shifts that Soper believes have played a role in mobilizing ethical or sustainable consumption practices.
Conclusion

The neoliberal nature of many AFN activities, particularly those that depend on a body of consumers to use their own personal judgments (such as farmers markets), lends itself to an examination of impression management within such activities; the risk that large global interests might appropriate the very system seeking to defy them may put AFN consumers into a skeptical frame of mind when assessing whether producers are sufficiently alternative. In addition to being a revival of a former method of food distribution, farmers markets also access notions of authenticity through both the production methods they are associated with (natural, organic, etc.) as well as the shortened supply chains that avoid rationalization of food. This sense of authenticity comes from a belief that cultural changes have steered people away from lifeways that were somehow more pure or otherwise carried positive characteristics (Sims 2009). Taylor (2001) notes that past is often equated with original so that authenticity reaches back to a seemingly unchanging past and therefore represents traditional ways of life. In this sense, alterity may give the sense to participants of a return to authentic lifeways (or, at least, foodways). Because appropriation would carry the appearance of alterity, the skeptical consumers are motivated to actively measure the reality against the backdrop of their expectations of what characteristics a real alternative producer would have.

I should clarify that the idea of a real, objective authenticity is something social scientists typically reject. Instead, authenticity is seen as a shared social construction, generated by people to reflect their beliefs and circumstances. Sims (2009) argues that focusing on how participants construct an identity exposes how people “experience a more authentic sense of self” (2009:325). In other words, the sense of authenticity that
people perceive does not reflect a return to some sort of pure culture or original practice, but is still relevant in social science as it can be important to people’s sense of themselves. Sims characterizes this approach as an “existential” one that has the researcher link authenticity to the formation of self by those who seek it out; this construction of authenticity is similar to the consumerist technique of using purchases as a form of self-authentication.

This relationship between authenticity and self is an important way to view the Vardamans’ practices. As I describe in the following chapters, the Vardamans utilized forms of self-presentation that not only gave others an impression of who they were, but also occurred in environments where a demonstration of authentic alterity was important to their economic vitality.

A case study of small-scale farmers in the American South is warranted. While the efforts to defy this conventional system reach across the globe, as is clear from the literature on Alternative Food Networks, this movement has many different manifestations because of the emphasis on locality. Each community differs on its participants’ ideas of the best ways to deal with or undermine the conventional food system, and there is a paucity of research into how this movement manifests in communities residing within the American South. In other words, the Vardamans may be situated within a larger movement, but an understanding of this movement does not necessarily lead to an understanding of their situation without further investigation. In the next chapter, I lay out both my research paradigm and my methods to arrive at this understanding.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

My research interest has centered on the connection between the Vardamans’ practices and their economic vitality. My approach to exploring this connection is ethnographic, conducted in a manner similar to what Miles and Huberman call “social anthropology.” This involves participant observation with a focus on behavioral regularities. As they describe it, analysis with social anthropology is designed to uncover how people manage meaning into and from their day-to-day lives and involves reaching “across multiple data sources (recordings, artifacts, diaries) and to condense them, with somewhat less concern for the conceptual or theoretical meaning of these observations” (Miles and Huberman 1994:8).

My analytical methods have been mostly inductive; while I started with my data to discover constructs and theoretical categories, I also drew from the analysis of other articles and books I discovered in the process of reviewing relevant literature to expand upon my findings.

Following Geertz (1973), I see ethnographic inquiry as a vehicle for expanding human discourse by capturing the normalness and particularity of its subjects in a way that renders them accessible. My approach has also been informed by what Guba and Lincoln (1994) call constructivism, a paradigm or framework that informs how I see social reality and the role of the researcher. In this paradigm, it is understood that the values one puts into an inquiry will always be present to mediate the findings so that subjectivity is unavoidable.
Collection

Before meeting them for the first time, my understanding of the Vardamans and their practices was second-hand, coming largely through vague descriptions from my advisor, Dr. Jeffrey Kaufmann. It seemed almost as if the Vardaman farm was isolated, independent, and methodically focused on sustainability. This impression I had, and literature I had recently read about both modernity and modern agriculture, had me thinking the use of draft animals was an intentional challenge to rationalized agricultural production. Thus, my primary focus during the initial two weeks was on why the Vardamans chose to use horses to farm.

With this in mind, I began with what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call “prolonged engagement” and “persistent observation.” I, along with three other anthropology students, participated in what is called “service learning” where we became volunteer workers while getting class credit. For two weeks in the latter half of July 2011, the four of us slept in the two log cabins on their homestead normally used for the “living history” tours and woke up with the sun each morning ready to work.

The Vardamans had little trouble using help from myself and the other three students. Some days we went out into the garden to weed or pick peppers and tomatoes. Other times, we helped bus tables, stock shelves, or clean in the store. One student was even tasked with playing her guitar during the daily lunches as a form of entertainment for visitors. I also spent time with Henry at the farmers markets in Laurel and Hattiesburg.

The other students and I also accompanied the Vardamans to their Pentecostal church three times a week (Chelsea would jokingly insist that they were the “churchiest”
people around) and even attended a couple of auctions with them. We ate with them, bathed in their house, and became familiar with their workers and the members of their extended family who regularly visited or worked at the store. These interactions became the foundation for a relationship that persisted beyond these first two weeks. In the three years since I began my observations, I have spent over 700 hours either at the Vardaman farm or with them at one of their farmers market booths.

The questions I had in mind shifted as my time with the Vardamans went on. It became clear that viewing the Vardamans’ practices as a response to the broader agricultural system was not a very salient lens; this realization makes sense in retrospect, as people’s responses to abstract institutions are not as palpable as those to individuals or a more concrete and local community. Thus, at the same time that I felt I had made decent headway into understanding the Vardamans’ motivations and the connections between using horses and invoking the past, I also understood that the conclusions I would draw from them would not have far-reaching implications about modernity or agriculture. My exploration focus shifted towards exploring the sense I got that the members of the Vardaman family’s community perceived themselves as distinct from other segments of a society that they belonged to and grew to see how tradition was interwoven with their perception that they stand out.

My research question changed with this realization from a question about horses to one of small-scale producers and economic vitality. In an environment where economies of scale and efficiency are prioritized, how do the Vardamans thrive economically? What sacrifices do they have to make in order to survive? When it became apparent that image was an important part of this, I also took special attention to
the ways in which the Vardamans managed impressions. What exactly was their image? Does maintaining this image ever come at a price? Do different contexts alter the ways in which impressions are managed?

These were the kinds of questions I was open to answering as I continued to help the Vardamans around their store and garden during many of my visits. I also helped them in other contexts, including the Festival, both in the construction of the 2011 Festival program; the distribution of the 2012 and 2013 programs to local shops, restaurants, and gas stations as a form of marketing; and as a worker on the scene in 2011, 2012, and 2013. I also accompanied them through most of the 2012 and 2013 farmers market seasons (roughly between April and October) at two of the four markets they normally participate in as vendors. Finally, I assisted them, again as a worker on the scene, in their second Christmas in the Orchard celebration. Since, as Chelsea says, “You can’t get nobody to do nothing for you for free,” I eventually came to conform to the local cultural practice of accepting payment for the work I did for them.

This search for answers and hands-on nature of interaction is participant observation, the bread and butter of ethnography; while participant observation prototypically involves long periods of staying on-site with participants, the bulk of the data collection phase in the case of my research was characterized by a series of visitations, rather than a long uninterrupted stay. I did not normally stay overnight on my visits. A car ride from Hattiesburg, where I was living during this period, would take about a half hour; a moped drive along back roads (my normal method of travel) took about an hour each way. Modern communication technologies have blurred this on-
site/off-site distinction, as the ability to contact the Vardamans via cell phone made a complete separation between my research site and my home site impossible.

Depending on what the ethnographer feels is important, he or she can emphasize the participant role or that of the observer. For me, the emphasis was generally more participatory while on the farm and observational when at the market. In both places, the slow pace of things provided many opportunities for idle discussion. While this helped with interviews, I found that the busy schedules of the Vardaman family meant that in-depth, one-on-one interviews were largely unfeasible. As a result, most of my “interviews” have been unstructured, and I have placed a greater emphasis on what Bernard calls “strategic” hanging out (2006:368); simply spending time with the Vardamans and others of their community in participant-observer mode has pushed me towards understanding their ways of doing things.

While I have a handful of audio recordings, particularly from my initial two-week stay, most of the speech presented is reconstructed from memory (with the exception of speech presented in block quotation form), often written down in my fieldnotes several hours after hearing it. This approach necessarily entails a loss of some meaning, as the words that come from the Vardamans cast shadows on implicit cultural values and on their non-reflective beliefs (that is, beliefs that come automatically and possibly contrary to beliefs arrived at through contemplation and instruction1). Even though I would like to think that I have an ear for people’s unique phrasing, I must acknowledge that the reconstructed speech is an imperfect copy, akin to the status of the ethnography itself as a reconstruction.

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1 See Barrett 2004 for more on non-reflective beliefs.
With my focus on the relationship between image and economic vitality, I paid close attention to what the Vardamans said to their customers about their produce or about themselves, understanding that their enterprise was an economic one that depended on perceptions. I sought out patterns so I could identify what was typical and what was atypical of interactions between the Vardamans and those who came to their farmers market booths or their general store. I came to see patterns related to how the Vardamans projected an image of themselves, particularly for those likely to interact with them economically. It seemed that this was a form of impression management. When the Vardamans successfully gave off the impression of themselves as sufficiently alternative or traditional, economic exchanges worked smoothly and in their favor. Exceptions of successful impression management often came from the responses of shoppers or potential shoppers that seemed to disrupt the normal flow of exchanges.

Analysis

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, processing constructivistically-obtained data is different from that of more positivistic analyses. Constructivist research is more inductive, starting with the data and then discovering constructs through the generation of theoretical categories from the data as opposed to attempting to falsify previously generated hypotheses.

I began to analyze more methodically when I developed an initial coding scheme for my data based on a handful of themes that I identified intuitively as seeming pertinent to my research focus. A number of authors, including Bernard (2006), Charmaz (2006), and Spradley (1980), advocate coding of data in one form or another. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest making a provisional “start list” before even the data collection
phase, though it seems to me that doing so would unduly prioritize any prior theorizing that I had had access to. Instead, my coding scheme was what they characterize as a more “grounded” approach because I waited until a lot of data had been collected.

Charmaz argues that prior theorizing can affect one’s research in a way that unnecessarily stifles the openness of inductive research because it can “preclude ideas from emerging as you code events” (2006:48). By coding after data had been collected, my start list was more in line with what she calls “theoretical agnosticism” wherein earlier theories “earn their way” into the analysis (2006:166). However, although I modified this list as I went through my data to keep in line with the theoretical openness that she advocates, my approach differed from what Charmaz describes because she suggests beginning the coding phase without a start list.

To code my data, I transcribed my fieldnotes, as well as notes on some of the materials crafted by or on behalf of the Vardamans in promoting their economic activities (web text, fliers, brochures, and online video) onto a computer and then used Microsoft Word’s indexing feature to mark blocks of text as being related to the themes in my start list. For example, I marked blocks of text if they were relevant to the notion of community or community connections. This theme, along with customer service, impression management, and time, turned out to be issues that came up a lot, prompting me to divide the themes into subthemes once I had coded all of my notes. I copied the blocks of text marked under each code into a separate file where I could comb through what I had determined were related incidents in a more focused manner and divide them into subthemes; time, for example, was subdivided into modernity/tradition distinctions,
nostalgia, and technology. Community connections were divided into those at the farmers market, those at the store, and those during the Festival.

In addition to making patterns more apparent, doing this gave me a better sense of what to look for upon further visits so that data would be more focused on these themes. It also prompted me to drop certain lines of inquiry that I had initially thought would be fruitful but were not.\(^2\) I also began “memoing.” Memoing is the production of theorizing write-ups designed to help tease out the properties and relationships that codes have (Miles and Huberman 1994). These written memos were claims of a sort, designed to be tested and refined with a look at further incidents in my data.

Memoing also enhances the inductive character of social anthropology, but it should also be apparent that my approach has not been perfectly inductive. Once I began the memoing phase, I also scoured the relevant literature to help inform my understanding of the scholarly context in which I could situate the Vardamans’ practices. Doing so exposed me to theories of other scholars that were very tempting to apply to the Vardamans. In addition, prior study on the issue of modernity as an anthropological concept was something that I could not help bring with me to my research site.\(^3\) This prior knowledge is part of the unavoidable subjectivity inherent in social research; I cannot come to the research site with a *tabula rasa*. Miles and Huberman (1994) make the case that the theorizing and empirical research from relevant literature can help guide a researcher in his or her own analysis, which turns induction and deduction into a dialectical pair, rather than two mutually exclusive approaches.

\(^2\) Other themes that I began with but ended up discarding or were not very salient to the focus of my thesis were the Amish, animal-human relations, autonomy, climate or weather, education, food consumption, labor relations, music, race and class, rednecks, and religion.

\(^3\) The notion of impression management is an important concept in sociology; again, it would be unproductive to try to eliminate this concept from my head just to say I was fully grounded in my data.
In my case, the application of these external models—most of them from the literature on food systems—came after I had gathered a lot of data; I also scrutinized such application to distinguish among models, contexts, or explanations that seemed pertinent to my experience with the Vardamans and those that did not. For example, a handful of comments made by James about selling his labor prompted me to consider the Marxist view of labor relations. However, the dynamic between the Vardamans and their workers did not really fit with Marxist theory. So I dropped that model. In the chapters that follow, particularly in the final chapter, I will be sharing some of the handful of theoretical models that are useful in comparing or contextualizing the Vardamans.

Trustworthiness

With a constructivist paradigm, making moves to demonstrate that findings are more than just the product of the researcher’s imaginative musings can put him or her in uncomfortable territory. I agree with Geertz (1973), who says that anthropological descriptions are the second-order product of the anthropologist, not part of the reality he describes. This means it would be inappropriate to apply conventional scientific approaches to constructivist-oriented research. However, Geertz sees the quality of ethnographic inquiry as being measured through appraising an anthropologist’s explications against what he calls “the power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers” (Geertz 1973:16); this, to me, seems like a vague, insufficient guide for an ethnographer to indicate to a skeptical reader that the findings are worthwhile.

Instead, I have chosen to utilize the trustworthiness criteria outlined in Lincoln and Guba 1985; these criteria are specifically designed to replace the scientific positivist
measures of social research. Positivists orient their approach around the belief that social life consists of a real reality that is apprehensible, and that findings should be objective, with an inquiry’s quality measured or verified with benchmarks of validity, reliability, and objectivity. Because these conventional positivist benchmarks do not work for the constructivist researcher, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer that persuading one’s audience that an ethnographic work is worthwhile involves demonstrating that its findings are dependable, transferable, confirmable, and credible.

**Dependability.** The results of an inquiry are the culmination of “the interaction between a particular investigator and a particular object or group” (Guba and Lincoln 1994:110, emphasis original). Since findings are mediated by the values that are put into the inquiry, results cannot be replicated. This mediation means that the researcher must take this sort of instability into account and also reflexively approach the ways in which the inquiry itself may have altered things.

**Transferability.** Inquiries that speak to other investigations are more worthwhile than those that do not; however, it would be an undue burden for researchers to determine the extent that their findings would be applicable to other contexts. Thus, a researcher is not responsible for determining how far something is transferable; that job goes to those with other research projects who can use empirical evidence and their own localized knowledge to make that determination on a case-by-case basis. In this sense, the original investigator is responsible only for “providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgments possible” (Lincoln and Guba 1985:298). Therefore, to help establish transferability, I am charged with providing a good, thick description that contextualizes meaning within behavior.
Confirmability. Because constructivists reject the notion that the investigator and investigated can be separated, the conventional positivistic attempt to form proper distance between them does not fit. Instead, the constructivist researcher seeks to make their findings show themselves to go beyond the researcher’s unreliable, baseless opinions into reliable and fact-based claims.

Credibility. It would be an error to attempt a description that purports to perfectly account for what is actually true for the subjects. Since the ethnography is a reconstruction, the researcher is tasked with forming a reconstruction that is an accurate reconstruction of a constructed reality. The ethnographer must carry out an inquiry in a way that will increase the likelihood that findings will be credible.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) leave the impression that credibility is the most important part of establishing the trustworthiness of an ethnographic account; establishing transferability is not technically possible and a demonstration of credibility can do most of the work in also establishing dependability and confirmability. As such, I have taken special attention to establish credibility in ways that Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest.

Member Checking

When I felt sufficiently confident with my analysis, I entered the member checking phase. Member checking involved fielding my findings and interpretations with the Vardaman family. Lincoln and Guba consider this “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (1985:314). Credibility requires approval by the original constructors. Member checking best allows for respondents to provide this approval when it encourages them to correct factual and analytic claims or add to either, putting
their assessment on record to make later claims of inaccuracy less likely, and also giving
them the opportunity to assess the inquiry’s overall adequacy.

The difficulty in conducting interviews impacted how I fielded my findings and
interpretations with the Vardaman family. I began by composing a preliminary draft of
my findings scrubbed of unnecessary technical jargon or theorizing and with extra space
for written commentary. I gave a copy to each of the three primary respondents: Henry,
Chelsea, and James. Each copy had an attached letter (Appendix C) that contextualized
the draft and instructed them to provide judgment of overall credibility, statements about
major concerns or issues, and statements about factual or interpretive errors. After they
had read my findings, I met with them at times convenient to them to interview them
about their responses, taking special care to take note of their words.

I then utilized their comments as I composed a second draft. Throughout the
following chapters, you will see the results of this member checking by repeated
reference to these statements generated from this phase. Wherever possible, I will use
direct quotes.

The Merits of This Methodology

I believe that this methodology is well-suited to address the questions I posed to
myself—about how the Vardamans are able to be successful economically—for several
reasons.

First, participant observation is a much better way to get at people’s common
sense than long interviews, which omit context and fail to bypass the fronts that people
put up. By persistently engaging and observing the Vardamans over a prolonged period
of time, I was able to spend sufficient time with them to provide both scope and depth to
the issue being studied. Bernard (2006) characterizes participant observation as hinging upon a process of rapport building that helps keep people from changing their behavior as they do when they know they are being studied. This rapport can get past fronts and potentially open up information that would otherwise be closed off to outsiders; participant observation also provides the right kind of information to allow the anthropologist to gain an intuitive understanding of what Herzfeld (2001) calls common sense: knowledge that is both experiential and useful in helping to know what lines of inquiry are sensible or contextually appropriate. In hindsight especially, where I see the importance of impression management in what the Vardamans did, I believe focusing on just interviews would only have provided one slice of their world.

Second, the inductive-deductive mixture of my analytic process allowed me to build my understanding from the ground up while still allowing prior theorizing to have an influence on my overall conclusions. Being purely inductive without regard to other sources would undermine the dialogic nature of ethnographic research. Being purely deductive would have been a barrier to having a fair understanding of my data on its own terms. Self-generated coding and memoing were useful analytical tools in ensuring that I was not letting my subjective biases steer me in the wrong way.

Finally, I believe the use of member checking was the best way to demonstrate that my findings reflect with the social reality of the Vardamans. Since ethnographic research involves observing behavior that participants do not necessarily observe themselves, member checking can run the risk of surprising them; some findings may even be perceived as unflattering or otherwise in contrast to a participant’s self-image. I believe that this is a strength of member checking, rather than a weakness. If a study is at
risk of being perceived as an inaccurate presentation by its participants, it is better to utilize member checking to confront them with these surprises before publication. This way, it is not too late to tell the anthropologist that he has incorrectly represented how they see and do things. While there is a risk that participants may utilize a front to deal with unflattering portrayals, this is not a problem for a study like this one that explores impression management. In this way, member checking both establishes trustworthiness and further enriches the study by allowing for an explicit mediation between participants’ self-image and anthropological findings.

My methods are designed to reflect my paradigm as a researcher, which I believe is something to embrace. As Guest et al. (2011) describe it, the story that stems from ethnographic research carries an underlying sociopolitical meaning. In addition to engaging participants in the crafting of ethnographic account, a constructivist’s desire to present multiple points of view means that they seek out a refinement of a larger debate, rather than a scholarly consensus. It is my desire that my research contributes to the larger academic discussion in this way.
CHAPTER IV

FARMERS MARKETS

By the time my research with the Vardaman family began in the summer of 2011, they had already woven into their local Alternative Food Network movement by participating in farmers markets, a form of direct-selling that connects producers and consumers by eliminating intermediaries like grocery stores. The Vardamans had been vendors at farmers markets since 2010, starting with the downtown Hattiesburg market and expanding to one in neighboring Laurel soon after. In the summer of 2012, they began vending at a budding market on the main campus of The University of Southern Mississippi and, the following year, they started selling at a market in Ocean Springs, a city on the coast.

While the Vardamans participated in these four farmers markets during my time with them, the downtown Hattiesburg market was their favorite. Depending on what they were doing, any of the three main family members might “go to market” in Hattiesburg. It was the market they had been at the longest and had a strong, loyal customer base. There may also have been elements of the atmosphere—the trees, the music, the shoppers—that they liked more than other markets. Because of the strength of their presence there, I will focus mostly on the downtown Hattiesburg market, though much of what occurred at this market is easily transferable to the other markets.

Impression Management

The image the Vardamans projected of themselves and their farm was important to their ability to thrive economically. Even customers who were not concerned with the risk of appropriation or with sustainable production methods still could find value in their
produce partly because the invocation of tradition or nature was still appealing. To understand how impression management operated at the farmers market, a helpful start is Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical model of interaction.

Goffman (1959, 1967) outlined a way of viewing face-to-face interaction that involved an extended analogy to stage productions. In the same way that actors in a theater take on roles and present these roles in understandable ways to an audience, day-to-day interaction involves continual attempts to influence the perceptions of others through social interaction. His main thesis, first outlined in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, is that the self is situational, being realized differently based on different social circumstances. This self is dramaturgic in that there is a presentation involved designed to influence others in a given occasion; these are ritualized acts of everyday life analogous to stage performances with actors and setting working to define the situation. These everyday performances involve efforts to convincingly play one’s role so that one’s self is shaped by everyday experiences. Goffman’s approach was closely aligned with symbolic interactionism, which holds that social meaning drives our actions, and that social interaction both creates and modifies meaning (Manning 1992, Holstein and Gubrium 2000).

The analogy goes even further in that successful performances depend on cooperation, with an audience taking the performance seriously and teammates helping each other maintain the performance. The interaction between meaning and self plays out in physical space, with both being dependent on situatedness (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). In the dramaturgical framework, physical space can be divided into front regions, where the situation is defined for an audience, and back regions, where performance is
relaxed and even deliberately contradicted. Neither place is necessarily the location of a “true” self, rather we have many selves that show up in different situations but are also tied to common assumptions that help provide a context that can then affect people’s perceptions (Manning 1992).

However, there are some caveats to this dramaturgical analogy. Of course, as Goffman himself explains, it breaks down when we consider the differences in speech and body alignment, as well as the tacit information that goes unshared in everyday life but is normally explicated to the audience of a theatrical performance. More importantly, everyday life differs from theatrical performances in that individuals are often inseparable from the roles they play. It is not just that participants cannot simply stop playing their role without negative repercussions but that the performance often aligns with their private sense of self, depending on the meaning they make of their environment and of others around them.

This model of interaction might seem to imply that Goffman believed that people were deliberately deceiving others through their projected self, though Manning (1992) points to Goffman’s distinction between giving an impression and giving one off: the former is admitted while the latter is more inadvertent, with the performer potentially not even aware of their performance. Manning argues that unwittingly giving off a projected self goes against the notion of actors being deliberately deceptive, as it means one can perform in a way that is in harmony with their private sense of self. Even when people act differently in different settings, it may mean that they simply have multiple selves. Tseëlon (1992) sees this distinction as parsing between intentional deception and simply
representing the possession of particular qualities. In this sense, being something requires acting in ways that reflect that sense of being (Tseëlon 1992).

Goffman’s dramaturgical model is helpful in relation to the Vardamans’ AFN activities because so much of their economic success depended on perceptions. As James explained it, using more natural or sustainable production methods adds value to his products, but people must see that value or they will not be willing to buy the products. The direct, personal nature of farmers markets means that their attempts at managing and influencing perceptions were primarily through interpersonal interaction, rather than more distant connections, such as television or print advertising.

With an understanding of social life as involving the presentation of a situated self in face-to-face situations, I examine below how the Vardaman family’s impression management strategies fit within their setting and helped them give off an image of rural, Southern, sustainable farmers.

The Booth

A farmers market vendor booth reveals a mixture of space management and economic practicality. Most vendors had a recognized, unofficial spot that other vendors respected. Being set up in the same place each time helped regular shoppers find them and also made the setup process smoother for everybody. There was still variation each week, as some vendors might fail to come or a new vendor might appear. As can be seen by Figure 1, representing the layout of the Downtown Hattiesburg Farmers Market one July afternoon, the Vardaman booth was adjacent to the parking lot. This position helped, as it not only simplified the loading and unloading process, but also allowed them to make practical use of the bed of their truck while vending. Figure 1 also reveals that the
Figure 1. Town Square Park. 1) vegetable plates, sausage dogs, crepes, all natural sno cones, cotton candy, lemonade, iced tea, fresh eggs 2) Jams & Jellies 3) flowers, fresh eggs, chickens, heirloom bulbs 4) main booth - t-shirts, market information 5) Herb Man - mints, rosemary, chives, thyme, basil 6) produce 7) goat milk ice cream, other goat products, local honey, fresh eggs, fruit preserves 8) produce 9) Breadsmith 10) hot tomatos, Mexican cornbread 11) soy candles, soaps, macramé plant hangers, yoga mat bags 12) kettle corn 13) jams and jellies 14) produce 15) produce 16) coffee 17) salsa 18) Vardamans 19) wooden kitchenwitems 20) soaps, lotions, scented sprays and body scrubs using all natural ingredients. Also, cakes 21) blueberry lemonade 22) Wooden toys 23) Hungarian lángos, handmade ceramic items 24) Italian cookies 25) blueberries, strawberry jam, blueberry bushes 26) peaches, plums and tomatoes 27) flowers 28) Goat Man - goat products and meat 29) pork and poultry.
Vardaman booth was right in the middle of the market, though it is not apparent that this was intentional or symbolic of anything.

The market officially began each Thursday at 3 PM, and vendors were asked to arrive at least 15 minutes early. The Vardamans often set up their booth by 2 PM. Arriving so early helped secure their location; while vendors respected each other’s spots, there was an awkward risk from early shoppers parking their cars where someone needed to set up. When I expressed surprise at how early the Vardamans liked to arrive, Chelsea explained that it was to sell to people who liked to come and shop early. She picked up the notepad she had been using to tally each sale.

“See that?” she said, pointing at the sales that had been made before the market officially began, “That’s eighteen dollars that I wouldn’t have made if I wasn’t here.”

Vendors set up with their own tables, and most had a canopy that helped protect against the sun and rain. Because what the Vardamans brought to the market depended on what they had grown and picked, the layout on their tables was different each week. When there was little produce, they made up the difference by bringing more bread and spices so that the tables still looked full.

Throughout the period that the market was open, items were often rearranged as things sold out; Chelsea in particular liked to reorganize how the items were laid out in their booth. Figure 2 represents the layout of the Vardaman booth one July afternoon when the market first opened. The top portion of this figure represents the main walkway of the market, where most of the market’s foot traffic takes place. Other vendor booths were set up to the left and right with narrow spaces between. These narrow spaces differed from the top space in that they were more strongly designated for buying or
looking, since only those coming from the parking lot would have reason to walk through them. Items in these areas were less visible to shoppers going through the main walkway, which gave the Vardamans a good reason to put the most attractive items at the front table.

Beginning clockwise from the chair in the lower left corner is the first table, which has A) peanuts in plastic bags, B) sweet peppers in small square baskets ($1 per basket), C) cinnamon rolls ($2 each), and D) Amish breads ($3 each); on the next table is E) a tray with larger cinnamon rolls in pans ($5 each) and smaller breads (both banana nut and fig, $2 each), F) eggplants and spaghetti squash, G) a basket with bell peppers of various sizes ($1 for the bigger peppers and 2/$1 for the smaller ones), H) sweet onions
in small square baskets ($1 per basket), I) “bitty” tomatoes in small round baskets ($2 per basket), and J) wooden crates filled with larger tomatoes ($1.50 per pound). The rightmost table, a smaller one, has K) more sweet peppers, L) dozen-cartons of free range eggs ($3 each), M) a five-gallon bucket of bitty tomatoes, partially filled, and N) a mid-sized ice chest filled with egg cartons, as well as cool drinks for the Vardamans. Finally, in addition to the O) scales, used for weighing produced sold by the pound, the inside of the truck bed has further back space materials like a basket used as a sort of cash register and a box with plastic bags. There is also a bucket on the ground that is the source of the onion baskets. These items can be broken down into different types.

*Produce sold by the pound or by piece* (F, G, J)

When sold in this fashion, the produce could either be given the same price for each item (such as with eggplants and spaghetti squash), or a scale was used to determine price (tomatoes). In these cases, shoppers usually chose which ones they wished to purchase. Deviations from this (that is, when whoever was waiting on the shopper chose the item) came with an attempt to get the weight to an even number.

*Produce sold in pre-selected portions* (B, H, I, L)

Weighing produce slowed down the selling process. Putting produce in baskets or in bundles was a convenience that either replaced weighing or moved it to a point before or between sales when there was more time to weigh properly. In addition to baskets, these could also be bundled together with a rubber band or, in the case of onions, placed in a large bag. Chelsea also explained that putting things in baskets instead helps people get a clearer idea of how much produce they would be getting.

*Breads and sweets* (C, D, E)
These were popular items at this market, though the Vardamans preferred to sell produce. When there was not a lot of produce to sell, such as near the beginning of the market season, they made up the difference with more of these breads and sweets so that their tables never started out with empty space. However, in these cases, they often expressed regretfully that they did not have much to sell.

**Vendor-only items (K, M, N, O)**

These items were vendor-only in the sense that they were not normally within reach for shoppers to use or touch. At the same time, they were intentionally put within the shopper’s view. For the sweet peppers and bitty tomatoes, the benefit to having them visible was that shoppers could see that there was more produce than they could see in the baskets on the table. These were otherwise sold by the basket but nothing would stop a shopper from asking to buy them by the pound or individually. When the cooler holding egg cartons was on the truck bed, the issue was similar, though there was also the practical consideration of keeping the eggs cool. The scales were placed within view of the shopper, but there was no extra effort to make sure that the shoppers saw the results of the weighing.

While there was a sharp distinction between seller and shopper space, the booth itself was front space so that, for the most part, the Vardamans were always “on” in terms of impression management. The unspoken rule against shoppers coming behind the tables meant that economic exchanges occurred over them. Overwhelmingly, economic exchanges happened across the table closest to the main walkway, which was the front of the booth. In addition, other types of exchanges across the tables were discouraged. In my experience behind the tables, this was the most obvious when friends or colleagues of
mine would come to the market, see me, and want to talk. Chelsea made it clear that I ought to move to the outside of the booth to have these conversations, especially if they were longer than a minute or two, as she suspected that these conversations would “drive people away” from buying from them.

Sometimes, when Chelsea stood in front of the booth to readjust the display, Henry teased her about this. “Mama, you driving shoppers away standing out there.”

Participants

Farmers markets have gotten a resurgence in popularity in recent years. In addition to the concerns listed in the previous chapter about sustainability and food choice, those who organize and manage farmers markets may also be motivated by community development, as was the case for the downtown Hattiesburg Farmers Market, or health and wellness, as was true for the Southern Miss Farmers Market. While vendors probably had different motivations for participating in farmers markets, it seemed fairly clear that they expected to make money from it.

Participation as a consumer in AFN activities like farmers markets normally means having enough financial security to go beyond making simple dollar-to-calorie calculations (Goodman 2004). While I did not conduct interviews to get a thorough understanding of the different kinds of people who came to farmers markets, it was still apparent that there were varying, overlapping motivations that depended on the perceptions that farmers market products are better than those found in a typical grocery store.

One motivation for some shoppers was health concerns. There was a perception among many people that organic foods are healthier, either because the chemicals
involved in conventional production (particularly fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides) are damaging to a consumer’s health or that conventional products have less nutritional value than organic products. A small portion of people had health issues, such as celiac disease or chemical sensitivities, that forced them to restrict their diets in ways that led them to try farmers market products.

Similarly, some shoppers had broader concerns about the environment. These shoppers might see problems in conventional agricultural methods because of agricultural pollution or because the monoculture and overproduction that they are associated with are environmentally unsustainable.

Concerns for health and environmental sustainability are related to those of animal treatment. Going beyond a desire that animal products be safe or sustainable, some shoppers also wanted to ensure that the animals were treated humanely prior to slaughter. As one shopper put it, “I want my food to be happy before it dies.”

Finally, shoppers may be motivated to support farmers who are local, either because they see a connection between local farming and the concerns listed above or because of a sense of loyalty to place.

Shoppers came from a variety of political and ideological persuasions, a somewhat confusing mixture that became apparent when one shopper, fiddling with his wallet after buying produce from the Vardamans, commented on the various dogs that people liked to bring to the market.

“I hope they’re as progressive as their owners,” he said. He caught himself. “Well, maybe not progressive. It’s more something traditional that’s lost and is now
returning.” He put his wallet away and smiled uncomfortably before thanking the Vardamans and walking away.

Market Script

The longer I observed the Vardamans at their farmers market booths, the more I noticed a pattern with face-to-face exchanges. As I got a more solid understanding of this pattern, the Vardamans became more comfortable with me helping them make exchanges, which helped me feel more confident that I had a good understanding of this pattern. Below, I outline this pattern, which I put in the form of a narrative script that works as the basic scaffold upon which face-to-face interactions between shopper and vendor take place. This script goes as follows:

I. Shopper walks up to booth. Shoppers expressed their intentions with their body language. They could express that they were not interested in the booth’s goods by not slowing down or maybe only glancing at the items on the table. On the other hand, standing in front of the booth, either facing the sellers or looking at the items was a clear indication of interest in making a transaction.

There were variations in this that went beyond interest or shyness. For example, some regular shoppers came to the booth with the intention of interacting more socially. Chelsea typically merged these more personal interactions with a fulfillment of the script, so she might comment on a woman’s pregnancy or catch up briefly while weighing or bagging. When the exchange was just personal (and therefore not part of the script), Chelsea usually stayed in the booth and talked with the person across one of the side

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4 Part of their reluctance was because I gave off the impression that I was a student without a lot of common sense.
5 To be clear, the following discussion is about a framework within which interaction takes place, not to be confused with the “cultural script” approach to interpersonal interaction and semantics developed by scholars like Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard.
tables. When he was sure that Chelsea could manage the booth on her own for a moment, Henry liked to step out of the booth to have a quiet conversation with someone.

Shoppers might also recognize the Vardamans through their general store or their role in the Festival, whether or not they had personally experienced either. They might also recognize the Vardamans from the school tours given on their farm. People could subtly indicate recognition of the Vardamans’ reputation by, for example, dragging their friend over and saying in a low voice, “this is the Vardamans” and mentioning that they run the Festival. It could also be someone looking at the produce on the table and then widening their eyes when they realized the connection. “Oh, the Vardamans.” If they were already talking to Henry or Chelsea, they might say that they had been meaning to come to their store.

II. Seller indicates readiness to make a sale. It was usually a simple greeting like, “how y’all doing?” or a comment about the weather. When she was feeling particularly enthusiastic, Chelsea liked to comment on the produce. She might notice someone looking at her tomatoes and say, “Ain’t they pretty?” When there were multiple people in a booth (for example, Chelsea, Henry, and myself), being the first to speak to a shopper also signaled a claim to be the one to “wait on” them (that is, to be the person who interacts with the shopper for the purpose of making a sale).

This step in the script involved a balance on the seller’s part so that they showed readiness to make a sale while not showing so much eagerness that the shopper felt put upon. At one extreme of readiness, the seller could stand up (if they had been sitting), grab a plastic grocery bag, and say, “What do you need?” At the other extreme, the seller could keep sitting and say, “Let me know when you’re ready.” The determination of how
much readiness to show was an intuitive decision that depended on context, the shopper’s body language, and things that the shopper said.

This was the make-or-break point that shoppers most often used to break from a potential sale. At this point, some shoppers indicated that they planned to look at all vendor booths before making any purchases, though this usually occurred with new or irregular shoppers. A similar tactic was to say that they were “still looking.” Either way, there was no obligation for them to return to either make a sale or to indicate that they would not be buying from the Vardaman booth after all. Some people simply walked away with a minimum level of acknowledgment that the sellers were there.

III. Shopper indicates what they want. Although the items were all within the shopper’s reach, the tendency was for the shopper to look at the wares and indicate verbally what they want. Otherwise, they handed the items to the seller or let the seller pick them up to put them in a bag (paper or plastic). Some shoppers brought their own bag (such as reusable cloth bags), in which case they would put the item in their bag. Items that were sold in small baskets were emptied into the bag so that the seller could keep and reuse the baskets.

For items that were weighed, the default assumption was that shoppers were capable of picking the items on their own. Selection was an internal process, though it seemed as though they used things like texture, size, appearance, and even smell to decide which they wanted. Shoppers might also ask the seller for assistance, either admitting that they did not know enough to know what was “good” or explaining that they were looking to use the produce for a specific purpose. They might also indicate
that they wanted a certain amount of the product, in which case the seller assisted in estimating the weight before actually weighing it.

IV. *Seller bags item(s), indicates price.* For items sold by the pound, weighing involved the use of a set of scales that was in a visible place, but not at the front table. The Vardamans owned several different scales but would only bring one of them to the market. The Vardamans did the weighing themselves and, for the sake of simplicity, they rounded the amount, usually in the customer’s favor. For example, a customer might bag some tomatoes priced at $2.50 per pound and then hand the bag for Henry to weigh. When he puts it on the scale, it reads an amount a little past a pound and 12 ounces, so he rounds down to one and three quarters of a pound. Then, because it may be too awkward to fiddle with change of the exact figure ($4.38), he charges $4.25. In the interest of simplicity, the Vardamans might even avoid weighing altogether and have produce available only in baskets.

Once all the weighing was done and all of the items were bagged, the seller would calculate (usually in their head) how much the shopper owed. If there were a lot of items or the seller was otherwise unsure of his or her ability to do the mental addition, there was usually a small calculator or a pen and some scratch paper available to add up the prices. They then announced the price to the shopper.

The seller put everything in one bag if it could fit. However, there were some exceptions. Onions, because of their smell, were often put in a separate bag (though this bag might be put inside the first bag). Items that were pliable, such as bread or cinnamon rolls, were rarely mixed with hard, heavy items like canned goods or heavy produce.
V. Shopper and seller exchange. Once they knew the price, shoppers gave the money to the seller. Depending on the customer and what was bought, they might already know the price and have the money ready.

The Vardamans used a wicker basket as a sort of cash box with the different denominations laid out inside. It was common for people to have inexact amounts, in which case change was returned (again, the difference being calculated mentally).

VI. Goodbye pleasantries. Once the shopper had his or her items and the seller had the money, the default assumption was that the exchange was over. There could be any number of goodbye pleasantries, such as a promise to come to their store, or to return next week. At a more basic level of pleasantries, shoppers and sellers could simply exchange thank yous.

Discussion

This script is a fairly basic framework and follows the interaction of an ideal-type shopper. Still, it allowed for deviations from this ideal-type without the Vardamans showing that they were annoyed. The further away from the script, the more marked the deviation became, though it was rare for the Vardamans to express that something was out of the ordinary in the presence of a customer. For example, a shopper might want an item normally sold by the basket but would like to select a basket’s worth from several baskets. “Is that all right?” they would say. Some customers might want only one or two onions, rather than a basketful, and an ad-hoc price was usually given (say, a dollar for two).

Some shoppers might pay with vouchers from the Mississippi Farmers Market Nutrition Program, a government program designed to promote healthy food purchases
among lower-income and senior residents. Each voucher would buy five dollars’ worth of food, but vendors could not give change from them, which added a constraint on what and how much a shopper could get.

Another deviation that occurred from time to time was when shoppers went through the script multiple times, effectively replacing the last step with the third one. For example, a shopper might put tomatoes in a bag, have them weighed, pay for them, and then select a basket of onions to be purchased. While these instances were rare (and possibly a little confusing), it took very little adjustment to accommodate that purchasing style.

Another type of deviation from this script seems to have come as a result of my presence with the Vardamans. Several times, Chelsea had me stand in front of the booth and offer samples of croutons, trail mix, or peanut brittle to passers by. The intention behind this was to draw people to the booth and to expose them to an item that they might not otherwise notice, effectively altering the beginning portion of the script where shoppers approach the booth on their own initiative. It is a little unclear what exactly prompted Chelsea to suggest that I give out samples; while factors like shopper traffic may be relevant, I suspect that the small space of the booth may have sometimes made the booth feel crowded.

Another tactic the Vardamans used, related to samples, was giving *ad hoc* discounts or additional produce. James was the most likely to do this. He explained his rationale at the Southern Miss market after Sean, one of the workers the Vardamans trusted to work at farmers markets, weighed some green tomatoes for a woman who then walked away when she decided they were too expensive. This sale ended differently
from when others had walked away without buying anything because it occurred at the wrong point of the script. James, sitting back in his chair, considered how to deal with that situation.

“I’m not going to change my prices,” he said. “But I don’t want anybody walking away feeling gypped.” He recommended to Sean that he give people a little extra if it seemed like they were not happy with the prices. It was not necessarily something people say. Sellers can see it in their facial expressions, and it is also something a seller can convey if they do not think the prices are fair.

Shortly after, James left the booth to Sean and me for a while and an old, thin professor with a Russian accent approached the booth and asked if the eggs were organic.

“No, sir,” Sean said. “They’re homegrown. Everything here is homegrown. We don’t use any pesticides or nothing.”

The man furrowed his brow. “This is like the eggs at Corner Market,” he said. “Free range.”

He turned his attention to the tomatoes, but said that he did not want to buy too much produce, since he would be leaving the country in a few weeks. He bought half a pound of green tomatoes.

Taking James’s advice, Sean grabbed a red tomato.

“I tell you what,” he said, “why don’t you take one of these red ones? If you like it, you can buy some more next week.”

“Really?” the man’s eyes brightened in surprise.

“Yeah. In fact,” and here he grabbed a large white onion. “Take one of these too.”
“Oh, wow,” the professor said. Any uncertainty in the purchase was replaced with a sort of childish joy. “I’ll come back next week and pay for these.”

Normally, these discounts were not as overt. They might even manifest as adding an extra tomato in a batch without saying anything. Determining whether someone might be uncomfortable with prices took a degree of subtlety and perceptiveness.

*Customer interrogations.* In almost every part of this script, questions from shoppers were welcome. As mentioned in the second chapter, the connection between producer and consumer inherent in direct selling ventures like farmers markets allows for this sort of interrogation of production methods.

Questions might occur at every part of the script without disrupting it, though they usually occurred in the second step, when the shopper was indicating readiness to make a sale. In my experience with the Vardamans, these questions were normally about the size and location of their farm, what sorts of inputs they used, and how the produce tasted. By focusing on these areas, they showed a desire for local farmers, organic or natural production methods, and quality produce. The focus of these questions makes sense, given that the desire for alternative markets stems from concerns of opaque, distanciated food networks that sacrifice quality for economies of scale.

For the Vardamans, these questions were an opportunity to convince shoppers that they were the right kind of producer. For the most part, simply answering the questions honestly was enough to assuage the concerns of skeptical shoppers. However, there were certain things that required a bit of subtlety or nuance. For example, the Vardamans did not find organic certification to be worth the effort (Lance 2012), but they also knew that the term *organic* could be easy shorthand for sustainable or natural products. When
people asked if their produce was organic, the Vardamans said that it was “homegrown” or “natural.” They sometimes did so as a correction (as Sean did above with the Russian professor), and other times they treated it like an agreement (“Yes, it’s all natural.”).

Another example of this kind of nuance came from James, who decided one year that not spraying with any herbicide to keep weeds at bay was too much work. Although he did use a spray, he used one that was not very effective so that he could tell anyone who asked that he used a weak herbicide. Doing this might lose some of the more extreme sustainability-minded customers, he figured, but it would help keep his prices down while still satisfying the rest of the customers. What I noticed from this was that the compromise between environmental sustainability and economic survivability came with a rhetorical nuance that allowed him to continue to convey purity or naturalness while admitting to using an herbicide.

In addition to answering these questions, there were other things they did to help convince shoppers. When people asked where their farm was, they had pamphlets ready. They had a sign by their eggs saying, “the happiest chickens in the South.” While it was usually too hot to wear it, I have seen Chelsea wear a khaki apron with the words “horse drawn produce farm” etched in red. She had even considered bringing a large picture of one of their teams of horses as a clear presentation of their natural production methods.

At the same time that these tactics were readily used, though, it was not a difficult task for them to convince shoppers; most of the work had already been done for them. Shoppers, at least the kind who asked questions, were predisposed to believe that farmers markets are full of local producers, that what they produce is better, and that their methods are safer for themselves and the environment.
This preset expectation came about most strongly when shoppers, who were normally the “audience” of impression management, assisted in the presentation intended for them. For example, while a woman was looking through baskets of tomatoes, she found a tomato that had a hole in it. Chelsea threw the bad tomato away and replaced it. “That’s because we don’t use, um…” she hesitated.

“Pesticides?”

“Pesticides, that’s right.”

While it is unclear what knowledge and experience each shopper carried with him or her, it seems likely that many of those who asked questions came to the market with a preexisting understanding of the alterity of farmers markets. So, when people did ask questions, the Vardamans did not have to spend a whole lot of time talking about themselves, their methods, or why what they did was important. Similarly, the shoppers who came to the market for reasons other than a desire for a better food system—perhaps doing so out of curiosity or for the atmosphere—also needed little convincing in this regard.

These interrogations were also opportunities for the Vardamans to convince shoppers of what they should prioritize. For instance, James conveyed the low shelf life of their bread as a positive, occasionally telling people, “It’s scary all the things they put in bread nowadays.” The implication was that the preservatives that allow grocery store bread to last longer than a week are toxic or somehow unsafe for consumption. In one instance, a shopper asked Chelsea about heirloom tomatoes and what made them different. Heirloom plants are typically grown for reasons that go beyond benefit to the individual consumer (such as the ability for plantback or promoting breed variety), so that
the benefit to the consumer is not clear. Chelsea’s answer, however, contrasted heirloom
tomatoes with genetically-modified, hybridized crops, even focusing on plant varieties
that produced their own pesticides, which she said might not be as safe to eat. “If the
bugs won’t eat it,” she said, “you don’t eat it.” In her description of the value of heirloom
tomatoes, Chelsea combined concerns about farmer autonomy with individual safety
from pesticides, thereby combining the acts of informing and persuading to convince a
shopper to prefer heirloom tomatoes.

If the shoppers only needed a little reassurance that the Vardamans were the right
kind of producer, the Vardamans were also able to take these questions as reassurance
that they were making the right production choices to thrive at a farmers market. For
example, a shopper wearing glasses looked at the sign that said, “free range eggs.”

“These are free range,” she said. “But are they really free range?”

Her question was based on the loose federal regulations of what “free range”
means. In conventional agriculture, chickens are kept in cramped spaces under
conditions that many find objectionable (Smil 2002); the term *free-range* is supposed to
be a contrast to this, as it evokes chickens moving about freely outside. However, in a
regulatory sense, there are no actual standards for what sort of outside access the birds are
given, so there may be very little difference in treatment (The Humane Society of the
United States). The sign (mentioned above) that says “the happiest chickens in the
South” was a quick way of addressing this concern, even though merely an honest
description of what the hens eat or their living conditions would take very little time. As
a way of encouraging people to visit the store, Chelsea might even offer to let shoppers
come see the chickens at her farm. In this shopper’s case, a description of how the
chickens were free to range around the farm was enough to satisfy her; she chuckled at the idea of knowing whether chickens are happy and bought a dozen eggs. When people asked about production methods and showed satisfaction like this, it was a message to the Vardamans that their methods were suitable.

The Vardamans might also get ideas for new practices from the questions. For example, one of the popular Vardaman items was Amish-style bread. Some shoppers had diets that prohibit gluten (a result of celiac disease), which ruled out their bread. Although she was unsuccessful in making gluten-free bread (she said it tasted horrible), Chelsea still tried to accommodate those with gluten sensitivities after being repeatedly asked about gluten-free breads. With the understanding that it had a little less gluten, she started bringing bread made from spelt. She did not do this for very long, though, probably because the demand for this spelt bread was not worth the effort. In addition to showing the interplay between what people say and basic economics, this attempt at making and selling low-gluten bread also allowed the Vardamans to show themselves to be flexible and accommodating to the market’s demands, particularly those that tap into desires for health and sustainability.

Although questions did not normally interrupt the script, there could be a feeling of interruption in the rare instances that the Vardamans failed at convincing shoppers of their alterity. One incident comes to mind, notable because of how rare something like this happened, when a woman with gray-blonde hair asserted that tomatoes taste different when they are grown in a large field, as opposed to a small garden. She asked Henry and Chelsea which their tomatoes were grown in. Henry said they were grown in a garden. To address her skepticism, he grabbed a small tomato and handed it to her.
“Take a bite and see.”

“See, this doesn’t taste like nothing,” she said, the partially chewed bite of tomato still in her mouth. “It’s a tomato, but it ain’t like we had growing them in our garden.”

“Henry,” Chelsea said, “if she don’t want to buy tomatoes, don’t make her.”

Henry indicated the Cherokee purple heirloom tomatoes.

The woman looked at them.

“See,” she said, “this is just like what everybody else has.”

“No,” Chelsea said, her voice beginning to betray her impatience. “They aren’t the same.”

Henry convinced the woman to buy some of the heirloom tomatoes. I do not think she came to the market again.

Back space whispers. After the woman walked away and the tension in the air cleared a little, Henry leaned in close to me and said that she did not know what she was talking about. Tomatoes do not taste different if they’re grown in larger fields. Maybe her tastes changed, he said.

He had not said this to her face, since doing so would have undermined the presentation of a courteous farmers market vendor. I came to realize that this act of quietly saying things outside the hearing range of customers was a special kind of interaction. Although the Vardamans would often say such things while still in the confines of the booth (normally front space), it was more of a back space activity because of the ways it went against their image. In my experience, these speech acts did not typically run counter to their presentation as hard working farmers but instead were comments going against their normal presentation of being friendly, kind, or eager to
make a sale. As back space activities, they happened quickly (sometimes amounting to a look) and when shoppers were not near.

For example, at the Southern Miss market one day, Chelsea and I watched an old, slow-moving woman drive out of the parking lot after she had bought some tomatoes. Chelsea said quietly that the woman should not be driving. When I chuckled, she said, “You hear me?”

“I didn’t hear nothing,” I said, understanding that what she had said was unflattering.

Another time when I was with James at the downtown Hattiesburg market, we overheard a loud woman expressing surprise that another vendor’s sample of blueberry lemonade had no sugar. James smirked at me and said quietly, “a shot to the head. It’s the only cure.”

When they amounted to poking fun like this, these little breaks in presentation allowed for a mixture of solidarity and fun. This was also a good way for an understanding of the Vardamans’ expectations to come out, particularly when it was hot and they were feeling “touchy about things.”

For example, near the end of one hot June day, a dark-haired woman with lips painted a deep burgundy came to the booth and asked Chelsea if there were still spots available for food vendors at the Festival. Chelsea said that they were full, and the woman then set out to buy a basket of tomatoes. When she started picking the best looking tomatoes from each basket, Chelsea asked her what she was doing.

“You don’t do it by the pound?” the woman said.
“We do it by the pound too,” Chelsea said calmly. She had already put up the scales. She did not offer to get them out. “If that’s how you want to do it.”

“I don’t mean to mess you up.” The woman with the painted lips continued to switch tomatoes from basket to her hand and then basket again. “Which is better?”

“It comes about the same.” Chelsea’s cell phone rang, and she left the woman for me to wait on.

The woman picked a basket, as well as some bread and then fumbled around her purse for money, explaining that she could not see very well without her glasses. She handed me a ten-dollar bill. I gave back her change and told her to have a good day. As she walked away, Chelsea stood close to me.

“Why oh why would anyone paint their lips like that?”

“She doesn’t have her glasses on,” I said.

A few minutes later, when no one was around, Chelsea said, “I don’t like the lady with the painted lips.” She told me that the woman would constantly bring up the Festival, expressing interest in having a booth there. But, considering how she was so difficult with little tiny things like tomatoes, Chelsea cringed at the trouble the woman would make for her as a Festival vendor.

“There aren’t enough tranquilizers in the whole county,” she said. So she just told her that there were no more spots.

These back space whispers could also feature statements that might prompt a customer to think differently about them, such as when Chelsea set up the booth one day, looked at the small amount of potatoes and onions and said to me, “We got a pitiful selection, don’t we?”
Of the three main family members, Henry’s back space whispers were the most likely to go against the image of sustainable farmers selling tradition. For example, when a shopper walked away after Henry had told them something he had was from Ohio, I asked him if it was Amish-made, thinking that he could have emphasized this to lead the shopper into seeing the item as natural or traditional.

He shrugged nonchalantly. “It’s all the same,” he said, “when it’s not produced locally and it still uses the same amount of fuel to get to Mississippi.”

Another time, a shopper asked about fertilizer, explaining that her chemical sensitivity meant she could not eat foods that used commercial fertilizers or pesticides. Chelsea and Henry said that nothing they had with them used commercial fertilizers and, satisfied, the woman bought a few peppers. After she had gone, I asked Henry about what he knew of chemically sensitive people, expecting that their desire to present themselves as natural or traditional might attract such people. He said that they knew of a handful and called them “fertilizer people.”

“That woman’s crazy,” he said. “You can’t live in America without coming into contact with chemicals.”

Particularly when I think back to this moment, it seems that Henry’s statement ran counter to the Vardamans’ agritouristic image that depended on the impression that people could escape from the modern predicament, with chemical pollutants being part of that. In general, though, Henry seemed more practical and less idealistic about this. He would occasionally tell me things that went against the sense of alterity or locality of farmers markets, such as pointing out vendors who did not make most of what they sell
or farmers markets in other parts of the area that would have local produce until they ran out and take in shipments from across the country.

Within these back space whispers, James could also be fairly matter-of-fact when considering how the impressions they gave off might go against the harsh economic realities of local farming. For example, in 2012 the Vardamans sold a lot of produce to an up-and-coming restaurant that sought out local producers. A venture like that isn’t necessarily feasible, in his mind.

“IT’s a problem of supply,” he said. “When our tomatoes are done growing,” he said, “they’re still gonna need ‘em.”

Conclusion

Participation in farmers markets was an important part of the Vardamans’ self-presentation. It reflected a typical form of food distribution prior to the onset of grocery stores and was also one of the most salient methods of selling what they grew, given the AFN choices in their area.

When they were vending at farmers markets, they acted in line with a role consistent with shoppers’ expectations of local, sustainable producers and did so in a way that was consistent with their identity as conservative, rural farmers. This consistency facilitated a sense of alterity or even authenticity vital to a thriving AFN market. The self-presentation strategies were primarily rhetorical, usually involving speech. However, they also had artifacts like signs and flyers that helped foster this image. This self-presentation made sense in the context of farmers markets, as market shoppers prototypically reject conventional foods and implicitly also reject the common assumption inherent in the conventional food system that technological changes lead
towards blanket improvement; such shoppers would be primed to accept traditional production methods as a viable alternative to conventional foods.

This use of impression management was also present in the Vardamans’ other activities. In the next chapter, I will discuss these other activities and how the use of nostalgia worked as an especially important target of impression management strategies.
CHAPTER V
AGRITOURISM

“Vardaman’s General Store is a year-round continuation of our mission here... to bring people of all ages and backgrounds together to celebrate our traditions, preserve our culture, and learn about our heritage.” –2012 Festival Program

By far, the biggest and most enduring economic activity that the Vardamans took part in was the Festival that they organized and ran on their property on the last weekend of September each year. In addition to hundreds of vendors selling food and crafts, there were demonstrations of stock dogs, as well as those of horse-drawn equipment and a competitive “mule pull” that involved teams of mules hauling weights; these helped to evoke a sense of traditional or rural ways in decline or lost. There were also events less overtly connected to this sense of loss like a beauty pageant, a “purtiest rooster” contest, and a charity bake-off. Living history tours took place at the Festival, though the Vardamans were less directly involved with these than with the tour I will describe in the following chapter.

The Festival was what Chelsea called an “agritourism” event; as this designation suggests, the Festival featured characteristics of tourism. Taylor (2001) explains that certain forms of tourism, what he calls “cultural tourism,” can involve attracting those who believe that something is inauthentic about their reality and that this lost authenticity can be accessed. This is not to say that all forms of tourism involve a desire for authenticity, though it seemed that this was the case with the Vardamans’ agritourism events. This attempt by agritourists to access a lost past by absorbing others’ realities was apparent at the Festival, as their sense of nostalgia would be readily accessed there,
making it seem that some would go there with the expectation that they would be able to reminisce. For example, when I was standing with a worker assembling some horse-drawn equipment, an older festivalgoer came by and began telling us about his life, saying that he had grown up in the 1940s in northern Mississippi until a boll weevil blight destroyed a year’s crops and his family moved to Chicago. Pointing to a nearby clothes washing display at one of the cabins, he said that people were “behind the times” when he was growing up and that the display represented how people in the area washed clothes back in the 1940s until people gradually acquired modern cleaning appliances.

![Figure 3. Layout of Vardaman’s General Store.
Back spaces (solid red)
Front spaces (blue stripes)
Patron spaces (light green with dotted outline)](image-url)
When I went to the display to take a closer look, another festivalgoer struck up a conversation with me and said that she had grown up in the 1950s at the border of Alabama, had used the device called a *wringer*, and that her family had not had a phone line until she was twelve.

At the same time that some people went to the Festival to reminisce, the desire to experience authenticity through tourism was undermined by the scale of the event; when it first began, the Festival had fewer than 200 people show up. Its massive growth since then (over 15,000 visitors in 2011) took away from the personal nature inherent in people’s conception of the traditional, meaning that visitors were confronted more strongly with the feeling of loss over former lifeways.

This massive scale was one of the reasons that Chelsea and James thought to start up Vardaman’s General Store in 2010. As Chelsea put it, “I love the Festival, but I do not like it. It’s hard work. It’s very stressful.” She explained to me that the store and the Festival built off of each other. Because they used contacts they had acquired from the Festival, it was the foundation to the store’s success. At the same time, because of its location in their pecan orchard (where the Festival is held), the store helped make managing the Festival less burdensome.

James expanded on this, focusing on the connection the store had with the Festival in relation to its idealistic goals:

But we sat down, and we said “what do we like about the Festival?” And what we enjoy about it more than anything is the community aspect of it. The sitting around, the getting together with people that we don’t see much over the year, and a lot of people from different areas that come and have the same values. Or, for
me, it’s people that come from Tennessee and bring their new horses; we talk shop and how that’s been going… And what we try at our store and our farm every day—six days a week, eight-to-six—is to create that same community but on a much more relaxed scale…

In their general store, they sold bulk foods and horse-drawn equipment. They also served lunches each day, which allowed a greater opportunity for people to come and see the horse-drawn farming.

General Store

Because their desire was to facilitate a sense of community, the store had a layout designed in part to do this through the use of space (see Figure 3). This use of space became immediately apparent upon approaching the building, as the north and east sides of the building shared a sidewalk patio area that had various antiques lain about, as well as a dozen or so rocking chairs (Figure 4). Coming inside from the main entrance (the north door, which had a large sign that says “Vardamans General Store” over it), visitors would see six aisles of various goods to the right, most of them from a bulk foods distributor. These included things like flours, candies, chips, jams, salsas, and oats. There were also Amish-made products like soap, jams, and sauces. At various spots in these aisles, there were baskets, some toys, and even a cooler filled with soft drinks. Past the final aisle was a partial wall and then a section designated for hardware items, specialty farming tools, and some horse-drawn equipment. At the southeast corner of the store was the kitchen and at the northeast corner was an office area with a computer. Other things in the store include a cooler with pies, cheeses, and milk, as well as a check-
out counter by the main entrance. Inside the store, there were various signs and pictures (Figure 5); there were several blown-up photographs of the horses and even a picture of Henry holding cabbage.

The main area of the store, from the perspective of a visitor, was the café, which consisted of about a half dozen tables of various sizes and chairs. Not only was this where visitors ate lunches, but it was also where they sat and interacted with others, even when they were not eating.

With impression management in mind, we can distinguish between three types of spaces in the store. The first is back spaces that were not readily visible to visitors. These spaces include the kitchen and the office, where staff did work and made decisions outside the view of normal visitors.

Figure 4. Rocking Chairs in the Store’s Patio Area.

The second type is front spaces that were similar to the inside of a farmers market booth in that they were viewable to visitors but were largely designed for the Vardamans

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6 There were also two bathrooms (though one was originally a just a storage closet), which were normally available to visitors. I did not observe bathroom practices.
or their workers. These include the north entrance to the kitchen (which was behind a cooler) and the area behind the check-out counter.

The third type is patron spaces. These include the shopping aisles, the café, and the patio. While patron spaces were designed with visitors in mind, the Vardamans and their workers might act in these spaces as well. When we consider the Vardamans’ goals of providing a space for community connections, the café and patio were particularly important as they were set up for the visitors to get a certain experience that invoked the traditional. Unlike the shopping aisles, where interactions between the Vardamans or their workers and visitors were more likely to effect distinct roles of shopper and store worker, the patio and the café allowed for a blurring of this distinction, giving the sense of a slow-paced and informal setting.

*Figure 5*. Wall Signs. Many signs like these displayed in the general store were also for sale.
The third type is patron spaces. These include the shopping aisles, the café, and the patio. While patron spaces were designed with visitors in mind, the Vardamans and their workers might act in these spaces as well. When we consider the Vardamans’ goals of providing a space for community connections, the café and patio were particularly important as they were set up for the visitors to get a certain experience that invoked the traditional. Unlike the shopping aisles, where interactions between the Vardamans or their workers and visitors were more likely to effect distinct roles of shopper and store worker, the patio and the café allowed for a blurring of this distinction, giving the sense of a slow-paced and informal setting.

Community Spaces

While locals were the most likely to come to the store just to buy things that they could not get elsewhere, people came from all over the state to eat lunches at the café. Typically, when visitors came during lunchtime, they would arrive and be greeted by Chelsea or someone standing behind the checkout counter. The visitors sat themselves at an empty table. Shortly after, one of the kitchen workers acted as a waitress, starting by taking drink orders (sweet tea was a common choice). She then left and returned with their drinks in Styrofoam cups.

The day’s menu was written on a chalkboard, and visitors chose a meal and three sides. The menu changed each day and was decided on by Chelsea and the cooks. Meals included things like chicken dumplings, beef stroganoff, red beans with sausage, and hamburger steak. Sides consisted of vegetables and smaller items and included things like black eye pea salad, squash, rice with gravy, macaroni and cheese, corn salad, lima beans, and pear salad.
Depending on how ready the visitors were, the waitress usually gave them time to figure out what they wanted by walking away and then returning a few minutes later. When the visitors were ready to order, they told the waitress, and she wrote the order down on a ticket (basically a special notepad), which she tore off and brought into the kitchen. She and the other kitchen workers, who had already made everything by the time lunch started, dished the food on disposable “throwaway” plates and the waitress brought the food, along with plastic utensils, from the kitchen to the table.

In addition to the food they ordered, visitors were often also served a dessert of some sort (slices of pies, cakes, cobblers, etc.) and had their drinks refilled. When they were done or almost done with their food, the waitress placed the check (basically the ticket with the prices and total written on the bottom) on the table. Payment was made at the front, along with any other items the visitor might want to buy.

The whole time, gospel or folk music would often be playing from a CD player at the western wall of the store. In the first two weeks of my study, when I was staying at the Vardamans’ with three other students, lunch time was often filled with the music of the student who could sing and play guitar, which visitors were enthusiastic about. One of Henry’s brothers also played guitar from time to time.

I think the Vardamans would stress that there was no pressure for visitors to leave once they were done eating or even after they had paid. This attitude went along with what James has said about the family’s goals. The general store was a place for people of different backgrounds to get together in a shared space where they could feel a sense of community belonging. This was intimately connected to why he farmed in the first place.

\[7\] Recently, the method of taking orders has changed to using half-sheet menus with the day’s items printed on them. Visitors circle the items they want and give them to the waitress. This method saves time.
Figure 6. Employees Only Sign. During the Festival, this sign was put up near the rear entrance to more strictly mark the kitchen as a back space.

With this attempt at creating a place for “food and fellowship,” the café and the patio can be seen as spaces designed to provide an experience that brings about nostalgia. The lunches consisted of southern foods that reminded many visitors of food that they grew up eating. Sitting outside on rocking chairs was part of a welcome cliché of slow-paced country life, making the very architecture of the store designed around nostalgia.

The Vardamans themselves could experience feelings of nostalgia in these spaces. One late afternoon, when the store was nearing closing time, Chelsea, another anthropology student, and I moved to the patio to prepare okra for canning. As she sat in one of the rocking chairs, Chelsea felt prompted to talk about the changes between the past and the present. Before, she said, you did not send your parents off to nursing homes when they got old; you took care of them. When she was growing up she would get up
early, do chores until midmorning, and then go over to mamaw’s until the early afternoon. Before, everybody helped everybody out.

“We’re a minority nowadays,” she said.

Bulk Foods

A notable feature of the store indirectly relevant to impression management was the contents of the aisles. Bulk foods were delivered to the store every week or so, depending on what the Vardamans ordered. These came in large boxes that were opened and then divided up into transparent plastic bags (maybe two pints or so in size), often with the use of a metal scoop. Each bag was closed with a twist tie\(^8\) and weighed using an electronic scale, which was kept up to date with item prices. For each bag weighed, the machine would spit out a sticker label. This basic label included just the name of the item, a list of ingredients, and the price and weight (Figure 7). The bags were then stacked on the shelves, a process that often involved reshuffling things around to make room. If there was no room, items could be stored in the back somewhere out of sight. Meanwhile, the empty boxes that the items arrived in were stacked in a pile outside and burned.

There are two different ways to view the bulk food items available in the store. The most tempting for this thesis is to view them in the context of AFN movement desires for local and sustainable foods. However, this approach would categorize much of the food sold in the store to be a failure. While some of the items—such as the Amish-made soaps, the free range eggs, and the jams and canned vegetables that the Vardamans made themselves—were local, most of the aisles’ contents came in bulk from a

\(^8\) Recently, the practice has shifted to the use of transparent plastic “shells” that are sealed once they are filled. These shells allow for a longer shelf life and are easier to stack, though they do not handle falling on the floor as gracefully as bags.
Pennsylvania-based distributor. Because anything produced locally (such as Camilla beans made in Louisiana) would still have to go through Pennsylvania to get to the store, Chelsea explained that there was no point in trying to get local goods through the distributor. In addition, finding local producers or having direct-sale agreements for the goods sold at the general store, while potentially cheaper, would require a lot of leg work and a bigger headache.

“There just isn’t the right infrastructure set up for that kind of local distribution here,” she explained.

![Figure 7. Sticker Labels. The sticker labels put on the bulk items can give information about quality and price, but not location. The upper right corner says “Thank you for your patronage.”](image)

The other way to view these bulk foods is that many of them were hard-to-find items. This view, which seems to be closer to what Chelsea intended, contextualizes the store as a good place to get things that people did not find anywhere else. One visitor explained that the Vardamans’ store had some of the jams and spices that she could only
find in a Mennonite store in Missouri. To her, the store’s value lay in what it could provide, not whether the items were local or sustainable.

It is not clear what expectations visitors had or whether local or localized products even mattered to many of them. I have talked with a handful of sustainability-minded people who felt that, although the transparent containers were helpful in determining what the product is, the sticker labels such as those in Figure 7 gave a misleading impression that the foods were all local or localized or that the Vardamans were somehow more intimately connected with the producers than they really were. This misleading nature was strongest with items that came from across the world. At the same time, people with this impression were less likely to return to the store, so they would not be the typical shopper anyway.

Chelsea’s criteria of what bulk goods to get from the distributor were based on “quality and price,” but she was also aware of the stigma of non-local products. This awareness became particularly prominent during the Festival one year. It was midmorning, and the store was beginning to fill up. In the attempt to grab some tables from the small storage room, a box of green bean chips (a very popular item) was left in the back area with the name of a very distant country printed out in big red letters on the side.

When Chelsea saw this box, she said in a low, forceful voice that I should get the box into the back office. She grabbed my arm, something she had never done before or since, and said, “Now.”

Later on, she expanded on her feelings of these boxes; when they had first started the store, they had gotten bulk items from a co-op in Pennsylvania. Another company
bought the co-op, and the green bean chips began arriving with the big red letters naming the very distant country. She was shocked and almost stopped ordering them because goods from this country did not fit with her conception of the store and of her sense of who she was. Although she decided to continue ordering them as a matter of practicality, I could tell that she was not perfectly comfortable about it because she insisted that I not share the specific location in this thesis. They also burned the boxes as soon as they could.

Christmas in the Orchard

As I mention above, the store was founded with the desire for bringing about a sense of nostalgia on a smaller, more relaxed scale. This desire for a relaxed scale also motivated the Vardamans to start Christmas in the Orchard, another yearly agritourism event, in 2011. Like the Festival, it was designed to access the traditional but was much smaller and more intimate. Christmas in the Orchard involved dinners served in the store, evening carriage rides around the farm, and music from carolers dressed in “Dickens outfits” (Figure 8).

The cabins were used as places to sit with a handful of people playing instruments; people inside with period dress served things like cider and homemade cookies. There were a couple of bonfires set up and, at least the two weekends I was there, a concession stand that sold food (hot dogs some nights, pulled pork the others) for people who did not eat the meals, as well as bags of marshmallows and sticks that people could use to roast them.

In my experience, Christmas in the Orchard accessed the same sort of nostalgia as the Festival and general store. On one evening, a man began talking with a middle-aged
woman working the concession stand about equipment from his grandfather’s farm. He said that his grandfather did not depend on all of it, but his family used it. The woman nodded her head and said that “kids these days” do not know anything about that lifestyle. Another person, after roasting marshmallows at a campfire thanked the concession stand worker for helping bring back memories.

![Figure 8. Carolers Singing at Christmas in the Orchard. Image taken from promotional flyer.](image)

**Economics of Agritourism**

I have so far neglected the economic side of agritourism. In addition to the meals that people would pay for and the items at the concession stand, Christmas in the Orchard also involved a large tent set up just for people to go through and buy things. The Festival itself had hundreds of vendors who paid for a spot to sell food, crafts, or to campaign for political office. School tours were partially economic, not just because of the tour fee, but the students, parents, and teachers were also invited to walk through the store, which could motivate them to buy things or come another day for lunch.
This touristic character of the Vardaman family’s enterprises is similar to an Italian farm’s adopt-a-sheep program described in Holloway et al. 2006. While the Italian farm’s program did not directly make a lot of money, it acted as the basis of other activities with people coming to visit their sheep and spending money while visiting. This Italian farm’s approach is similar to the Vardaman school tours and other activities that would get people to come visit the store; the intention was to get people to buy a few things and thereby create customer loyalty.

Like the Vardamans, these Italian farmers had a strategy of combining production, tourism, and marketing, which Holloway et al. claim contributes to “small business survival in specific local contexts, in ways which are simultaneously ecologically and culturally sensitive, and which are key to understandings of sustainability” (2006:223).

*Figure 9. Christmas Tent with Festive Goodies to Buy.*
The Vardamans were similar in that they did more than provide goods that they thought people would like. They also presented a narrative or frame of reference for customers and potential customers, giving them a context that aided them in seeing value to the Vardamans’ practices. An example of this comes from the previous chapter, when James characterized the low shelf-life of their bread as a positive.

Conclusion

It is difficult to focus on economics without sounding jaded, like the Vardamans were making a deceptive calculation. In more back space moments, Chelsea has even said that they started the Festival to “make a dollar,” and they began vending at the farmers market primarily to advertise for the Festival. But, as James explained when commenting on an earlier version of this thesis, “this is a free market system and somehow something has to kill the chicken.” Making money is not necessarily a bad thing, particularly when it is through providing an experience that people appreciate. More importantly, there is no indication that the Vardamans are being untowardly deceptive about themselves. Beyond this, it is also clear that the Vardamans enjoy their work. This attempt to find joy in their work is something that James had insisted his mother do; no matter what, she should choose work that she liked doing so that the work itself would be enough of a reward. Success would come no matter what, he said, and she might as well enjoy doing it.

More importantly, the Vardamans’ narrative focus was a necessity within a larger context of industrialized agriculture and rationalized economics where price and efficiency take priority over quality and choice. Without the use of impression management, the Vardamans would be stuck within that larger system and fail
economically without making sacrifices to quality and their private sense of self that they did not want to make. In this sense, Vardaman family members used the interplay between their cultural beliefs and their identity as farmers to give off a self-image that drove their economic activities. They were the most in their element when able to create spaces that allowed them to hone a favorable self-presentation and form lasting bonds with customers.

The ability to give off the impression of living in ways similar to past practices involved an invocation of nostalgia. In the next chapter, I will explore an important rhetorical framework that involved an interplay between practices and artifacts considered traditional and those considered modern. With this framework, even when the sense of nostalgia is not evoked, the belief that the practices are traditional remains.
CHAPTER VI

TRADITIONAL–MODERN FRAMEWORK

In previous chapters, I have outlined how the Vardamans utilized impression management to give off an image of rural, sustainable farmers. Particularly when they were on their property, they also encouraged a sense of nostalgia and gave off the impression that they had taken on traditional practices, which makes it tempting to assume that they were resisting modernity. However, viewing them this way misses the larger picture of what was going on with the Vardamans.

To understand this picture, we must first understand that we likely have a pre-loaded understanding of what modernity and tradition are. This understanding taps into a common sense—present in both mainstream American culture and even in academic circles—about the ways cultures change over time and how peoples react to increased contact. One of the expectations from this common sense is that increasing commodification of agriculture (as seen in the United States of the last century) will lead farmers to switch from draft animals to the use of tractors and other machines. The idea is that this process of modernization is irreversible, with global markets forcing farmers to adapt to rationalized production to survive economically.

This common sense also pairs up modernity, which projects place in relation to a distinct past-present-future timeline, with modernization, which emphasizes the development of a world capitalism that places primacy on the reorganization of space for political and economic purposes (Trouillet 2002). This reorganization—most strongly instituted across the world through capitalism, industrialism, political control from the nation-state, and industrialized military power—separates time and space from context.
Such disembedding and distanciating mechanisms create what Foster (2002) calls “expert systems” that are locally present but interdependent with things not present, requiring a certain amount of trust in unseen, abstract forces. This is the connection between modernity and consumption, meaning resistance to modernity may implicitly lead to a resistance to buying and selling goods.

However, as I lay out below, the Vardamans did not really fit in with this paradigm. Instead, they used a common set of beliefs and rhetorical devices to invoke the traditional in ways designed to guide other participants into viewing their practices as authentic and traditional. Although these practices were technically imperfect recreations of the past, the Vardamans’ strategy was not to misrepresent themselves or their practices as perfect recreations, but to create a sense that they had restored at their homestead things lost from a previous era. The beliefs and rhetorical devices that were part of this effort formed the basis of what I call the traditional–modern framework, upon which tradition and modernity were navigated to trigger nostalgia for participants or even demonstrate sustainability to consumers and allow the Vardamans to reflect their identity and ideology in ways that ultimately helped them economically.

Alternative Modernities

To make sense of how the Vardaman family navigated this traditional–modern framework, we must first unseat biases about what these terms mean. It should be no surprise that modernity and tradition are terms with culturally defined meanings, rather than existing as some sort of culturally neutral or universal concepts.

There is little justification for considering these concepts into something supposedly objective or universal, as even anthropologists do not agree on what they
mean. Friedman (2002) identifies a number of different meanings used in anthropological literature, most of which deal with interactions between Euro-Americans and non-Western peoples. These different meanings include cultural space propped up by Euro-American powers as universal; the core of a core-periphery structure wherein modernity exists elsewhere for the periphery, either to be emulated or rejected; and products of global capitalism and said core (2002:289). These meanings reflect an evolutionary model that implicitly places Western culture at the top of a categorical hierarchy and implies that non-Western societies are stuck in Europe’s past—a view rejected by anthropologists but recognized as still at play in global society. As Ferguson (2006) explains, early anthropologists rationalized Euro-American cultural prestige through this evolutionary paradigm, implicitly helping legitimize the global dynamic; by virtue of a long history of domination and exploitation, Western powers have so thoroughly prescribed their notions of cultural change that these culturally-bound notions, easily described in anthropological terms, have become semi-universal. In other words, common understandings of modernity are real-world manifestations of outdated anthropological theory, a sort of projection of Western powers’ own experiences expanded to a “universal scale that they helped to create” (Trouillet 2002:220).

Ferguson (2006) sees this as the reason why discourse on modernity and globalization continues to reflect this evolutionary framework, particularly by the very people who enact real-world policies. In discussing models of European-African interactions, he explains that the case for structural adjustment programs—which themselves come from international actors seeking to effect governmental changes in nations deemed to be in need of economic development—is made through a strategy that
Ferguson calls “scientific capitalism” where policies reflecting shaky economic principles are laced with the legitimizing language of scientific certainty, thereby masking their cultural or ideological biases. One of the effects of this is that peoples affected by these development policies and exposed to the legitimizing rhetoric have adopted development ideologies for themselves, even if the policies were unsuccessful. As much as anthropologists might try to steer away from the evolutionary paradigm of now-outdated anthropological thinking, Ferguson believes that “the analytical tools closest to hand are themselves part of the social and cultural reality we seek to grasp” (2006:89). That is, the folk categories of even marginalized, non-Western groups may include terms like *transnational, network,* and *development.*

Karp (2002) argues that usage of this co-opted jargon reflects localized understandings about the meanings and relationships between *modernity* and *development* that may differ from those of development institutions. He argues that the moral overtones and implicit discriminatory attitudes inherent in popular and economic discourse have consequences in attitudes about what it means to be modern. This means that *development* and its semantic underpinnings are not simply exported from Western countries but are reshaped to form local attitudes influenced by global powers. Even when there are common ideas and imagery, the differences in how these ideas and images are circulated and received among different peoples is important (Karp 2002). Foster (2002) says that most academic explorations of multiple or alternative modernities focus on localized receptions of a Eurocentric modernity brought to non-Western peoples, with “dialectal” changes that reflect a local flavor.
A good example of this dynamic comes from Walley 2003, which shows how development discourse is socially located at Mafia Island Marine Park, a marine park in a Tanzanian archipelago combining development with environmental conservation. As Walley explains, appointed officials from the national government had views of development that echoed that of international actors, with development being associated with infrastructure and an international social hierarchy. These officials viewed the island’s lack of development as being due to the “backwards” residents’ ignorance, laziness, and devotion to tradition. The residents also saw a social hierarchy, but their view of development did not reflect a traditional–modern divide, nor even a progressivist view of history that assumes a future arrival of development. Instead, they saw development as a source of wealth. They desired it but were cynical about it since they saw Africa as being increasingly marginalized.

Meanwhile, the island was a location for Euro-American tourists and expatriates; these groups approached the lack of development in a modernist mindset wherein non-Western cultures are viewed as closer to nature by virtue of being untouched by the West. At the same time that the residents expected greater development from the tourists, the tourists themselves saw development ruining a local non-Western culture. In this sense, any development—that is, any move towards modernization—was a step away from the island’s authentic culture. Missing the international hierarchies that the residents and appointed officials saw, tourists would take pictures to document the island’s closeness to nature, viewing it as a positive feature of the area. The residents, meanwhile, were embarrassed by their lack of development and some would even try to highlight the few developments they did have (Walley 2003).
As we recognize that *modernity* can have different meanings depending on context, we should be wary of the opposite risk: a number of anthropologists overuse the term, creating what Knauft (2002a) characterizes as an ungeneralized body of “micromodernities that are so locally and culturally situated that they become practically a synonym for current custom or personal performance” (2002a:20). Because this can turn modern into a fancy synonym for contemporary, it then becomes semantically empty. While doing so may often be part of an attempt to legitimize local practices as something other than primitive or traditional holdovers from the past, it may also have the effect of whitewashing socioeconomic inequalities and, more importantly, ignoring the views and aspirations of the peoples being described (Ferguson 2006). In other words, this sort of pluralized body of modernities fails to interrogate power relationships housed within the way it is used outside of anthropological circles. In cases like that of Walley 2003, rhetoric surrounding development is a way to see how modernity is articulated. Just as development is shifting and paradigmatic in response to policy shifts, rhetoric also presents modernity as both a ranking tool in social hierarchies as well as a sort binary in-or-out exclusiveness of international membership (Walley 2003).

Pluralizing and relativizing modernity, Donham (2002) says, also misleadingly suggests that all modernities are on equal footing with each other. As the very notion of modernity arose with cultural interactions that accompanied pressure to copy westerners, local motivations to do so come from a desire to bridge gaps in wealth and power. With greater communication from globalization comes a greater appreciation of such gaps. Brison (2003) reiterates this point, identifying both the global connections that open up access to a dizzying supply of ideologies and lifestyles, as well as the power, money, and
prestige that give Western content weight. Thus, notions of individual autonomy and achievement are gussied up by being present in the wealthiest of world citizens so that the free-for-all may still be there, but the choice of self-identification and creation is contextualized with influence so that Euro-American ideas predominate, making modernity pose similar problems to different peoples, though prompting a variety of responses (Brison 2003).

As the above suggests, much of the academic discussion of modernity focuses on the global interactions between peoples, nation-states, and international actors. Kelly (2002) even makes the case that a modern–non-modern binary is designed to mark a distinction in the global contemporary world between those who reap the benefits of exploitation and those who do not. Just as we look at back at civilizing as a rationalization for the power dynamic of past European colonial Empires, future scholars may look back at modernizing or development as a similar rationalization for American post-war power (Kelly 2002). In other words, no definition of modern could conceivably exclude Europe or the United States. This design leads to a certain amount of resistance to applying the same sort of anthropological scrutiny to the modern world. Wardlow (2002) points out that the artificiality of this dynamic includes a generalized Western prototype, despite Europe and the United States both having enough cultural, economic, and political variation that no definition of modernity would allow for such continent-wide consistencies in character or characterization.

Hybrid Formation and Purification

This concept of an ungeneralized West is a good point to return to the Vardaman family and their practices. Not only does it not follow that they must be modern because
of their place within the United States, but even framing the issue around whether they are modern or not avoids seeing the important work they did in navigating a traditional–modern framework. This navigation is a way for them to address changes in society and also to play out their values.

A good way to lay this navigation out comes from Latour (1993). As with the above scholars, Latour sees modernity as a sort of time relation that people use to compare new with old. He also sees modernity as involving the application of value judgments that use a conceptual framework separating nature (non-human) from culture (human). As Latour portrays it, people commonly compare new with old in a binary so that there are only two possible categories. In this binary-as-framework, these separations interact while being distinct, akin to a government’s judicial and executive branches. In Latour’s view, though, such binary thinking ignores all the things that are mixtures of new and old, natural and artificial, traditional and modern, etc. He carries the government analogy further, arguing that an understanding of how things can be a mixture of nature and culture and how these impure hybrids actually associate and mix together violates a sort of social compact or constitution that denies the hybridity of these quasi-objects and quasi-subjects.

An example of this sort of hybridization comes from what Kloppenburg (2004) calls “commodified seeds.” Plants have a natural component, being part of life on Earth even before the onset of human efforts at control, but have also had a cultural component as certain plants came to be domesticated for human consumption. The nature–culture binary is thus complicated by domesticated plants, which are hybrids of nature and culture because they not entirely the product of either. The impurities in this binary
further increased through a shift from farmer-centric plant breeding to scientist-centric
efforts around the turn of the twentieth century when Mendel’s discovery of genetics
became popularized. Key to this shift was the reorientation of biological sciences of
agriculture to the logic of commercial capitalism so that agricultural science was
reoriented towards creating practical applications that benefit private industries. The new
strains produced by these scientific efforts are so loaded with culture that cultivars
themselves can be patented, owned, and sold. Yet, they also carry elements of nature
because they are essentially tweaks of naturally existing genetic information and their
utility depends on naturally-occurring biological processes (e.g., cell replication, protein
inscription) that are not even completely understood. The same can be said of plant
varieties that have been crossbred in a way that encourages the purchase of new seeds
each season, as well as varieties altered through the direct genetic modification of “in
vitro horticulture” (Kloppenburg 2004:206).

Kloppenburg also points to a decades-long process of acquiring the genetic
information of “exotic” plant varieties from around the world for free, under the principle
that such varieties are part of a shared heritage that positions the development of these
varieties outside the capitalist sphere of ownership. These varieties are the product of
generations of human effort, yet, because their origin and characteristics resist
commodification, they are considered part of nature. This dynamic is consistent with a
modernist paradigm that fits cultural phenomena into an economic system of value while
being unable to recognize value in the natural. Only when the characteristics from these
varieties can be fit into the commodified seed category can they be said to have value.
Because those varieties developed by non-modern peoples are considered natural, no
compensation is given for them. Meanwhile, when scientists fine-tune these characteristics, the new strains are considered to be part of culture and are sold in seed form within a market that protects the rights to own the genetic information within the seeds.

To Latour, modern sensibilities have us affirm these distinctions even as all of these hybrids between nature and culture are discovered. This cognitive dissonance works through a process of hybrid-formation and purification where hybrids are created and then, so that they do not work against the binary distinction, their hybridity is denied through a process of purification where people use their values to help guide them into maintaining the binary and classifying objects into one or the other category. Even those who assert that they are not modern or are anti-modern utilize the same framework of binaries, making it a sort of conceptual arena in which actors orient themselves (Donham 2002).

The traditional–modern framework that the Vardamans utilized involves a similar binary to the one Latour explores, though it was one between past (tradition) and present (modernity). Understanding this framework involves spotting these hybrids and documenting how people purify them into the traditional category or the modern one. Although Latour did not explicate the process of identifying hybrid-formation and purification, we can make such identifications and predictions from his descriptions of binaries. Based on this understanding, we would expect to find three things to come from a traditional–modern framework:

First, we should expect to find imprecision in references to the past. This imprecision may involve a treatment of the past as if it were static until a recent period of
change, though it may also entail vague indications of when past practices took place. Such imprecision would imply that past and present are treated as two distinct parts of a whole, with some sort of event marking the distinction. The imprecision could also belie a tacit agreement about which historical period is worth considering more, though this still represents thinking along a binary, as the distinction would still be between the present and a particular past that immediately preceded a historical event considered important.

We would also expect to find hybrids, phenomena that are a mixture of traditional and modern because they do not neatly fit into either category. More importantly, we would expect these hybrids to be purified through processes that fit them into one of two categories (traditional or modern) with little acknowledgment of this process.

Finally, we would expect to find value judgments regarding the past and present. With our knowledge of the Vardamans and their community, we can expect that the value judgments would be in valuing the past over the present, though finding value judgments the other way would not go against the presence of a traditional–modern framework, only show a different orientation within it.

**Living History Tours**

I begin with a nine-minute video used to advertise the Vardamans’ “living history demonstrations” held at their farm. The video was filmed and produced in 2009, before the store was built. It is worth exploring because, as an advertisement of sorts, it reflects editing choices designed to highlight why students would benefit from a tour of the Vardamans’ farmstead. Given that the underlying thesis of this video is that such a trip would provide historical knowledge, it seems that it would thus access the traditional–
modern framework in a revealing way. Chelsea explained to me that the scripting and editing choices were the filmmaker’s, though she felt the video was good enough that she later hired the same individual to make videos for two subsequent Festivals (2009 and 2011). Because of the artistic freedom given to the video maker, this video is also relevant to the impressions they give off in the context of the traditional–modern framework.

The video starts with what looks like stock footage of conventional farms with tractors going over large fields. Soft guitar music plays in the background. “Today,” the male narrator begins, “when we think about farms, we probably have an image of vast fields of grain being planted and harvested with large tractors pulling various types of farm equipment.” The video cuts to a close-up shot of produce inside a grocery store. “Much of what we see in our supermarkets today comes from large corporate farms. But it wasn’t always that way.”

Figure 10. Screenshot Showing Two Teenage Girls in “Pioneer” Clothes.
The next shot is of a log cabin with a wooden fence. In the forefront is an old piece of horse-drawn farm equipment. The next shot of the same cabin shows the fence’s open gate. We see two women in some sort of period dress (Figure 10) walk out of the cabin and then a shot of children in school uniforms standing outside an animal pen. The narrator speaks as we see all this: “In fact, in the past, most of our country was fed by food grown and raised on small family farms. Farms where everyone in the family, even the children, had an important part to play in helping feed the nation.” As the shot changes to a “victory garden” with a handful of plants penned in by another wooden fence, he says, “This was a time when the terms homegrown and organic farming was just an ordinary everyday part of life.” The shot fades as a rooster crows, and the soft guitar playing dies down.

Even here, at the 50-second mark, we see two of the three elements mentioned above. First, there is imprecision in the treatment of the past as there is (so far) no indication of when “in the past” refers to. We also see a subtext of value judgments between past practices and present ones. It begins with the use of the word corporate, which can easily evoke an image of a bureaucratic, uncaring conglomerate (if not the problems of conventional farms mentioned in previous chapters). The description of the nation being fed by small family farms has a plain tone of reverence, as if to say that the people of the past were admirable because of what they accomplished. The reference to the terms homegrown and organic farming is designed to contrast with their current usage, with homegrown and organic goods being part of special forms of production. These concepts also help pave the way for purification, as corporate farms are implied to be modern while homegrown or organic farms are implied to be traditional.
The video continues, contrasting reading about “what life was like in an old family farm” (showing children looking through a book together) with being able to “actually experience life on an old family farm” (showing a small child standing outside a chicken pen). Livelier music begins. “You can do just that at Vardaman’s Farmstead,” which the narrator says is “nestled in a luscious pecan orchard” as we see a shot of the orchard. We see the cabins again, though now it is clear that the cabin and victory garden shown earlier are part of the Vardaman Farmstead, which the narrator describes over the crowing of a rooster as “a living history farm life experience where you get to roll up your sleeves and see what life on an old family farm was really like fifty to a hundred years ago.” This reference to a time frame is the most precise the video gets in its treatment of the past. The imprecision expands when we consider that the narrator is not clear if this description is supposed to be just for Mississippi, the American South, or a broader area.

*Figure 11.* Learning Stations Map. Tour guides are given a copy of this sheet with the station order for their group.
Cut to Chelsea Vardaman standing in front of a group of children and adults, smiling and looking dutiful while holding a clipboard. The narrator refers to her experience with the Festival and explains that the farmstead’s learning stations she has set up (Figure 11) are “designed to allow participants to experience the fun, joy, and even some hard work, which was part of life, on an old family farm in the Mississippi coastal plains area.”

This notion of experiencing the past is important, as it begins to expose hybrids of the traditional–modern framework. At the same time that it is implied that something valuable was lost in the shift away from family farms, it is also implied that it is possible to access that former lifeway and bestow something valuable to anyone visiting the farmstead. The Vardaman Farmstead is an imperfect recreation of the past—it would necessarily have to be, as the Vardamans must make practical decisions to survive economically—but it is still considered an access-point to the past, thereby glossing over its hybridity. This rationale for the hybridity that comes about through practical interests becomes clearer when Chelsea is given a chance to speak directly to the viewer. She does so standing in front of a cabin as she explains the purpose of her farmstead:

We started building the farmstead actually for the Festival that is 23 years old. Last year at the Festival—we have the Festival in September—and last year at the Festival we had four hundred kids from area schools come out in field trips. And we decided this is a working farm. This is not something that we just do once in a while. We get up every morning and milk and feed chickens and hoe the garden and do all these things. And so we said “what a great learning experience for the children.”

While it is clear that Chelsea is trying to highlight the educational importance of the farmstead, I want to focus on her description of the homestead as a “working farm.” There are two sides to this. The first is that it gives the impression that this farmstead is
more authentic than one that is just for show. Remember that a key part of modernity for a lot of people, particularly those who seek an escape from it, is a loss of authenticity. This means that, in addition to getting an experience of a time that was more authentic, the experience itself gives a stronger sense of authenticity by being more than just a show for visitors. The other side is that Chelsea’s list of things that make hers a more authentic farm are actions, so she is focusing on what is being done rather than how. This focus on actions shows that, in order for their farmstead to actually work, they choose to avoid the pitfalls of attempting complete historical accuracy. The crops they grow do not have to be the kind that were grown in the past, the tools and equipment do not have to be perfectly accurate, and it is okay to buy feed from the local modern feed store. Because the farmstead is an imperfect replication of the past, we are getting a glimpse into what parts of the past the Vardamans see as important to recapture. This glimpse also opens up a whole arena of hybrid-formation, which allows us to tease out the hybrids of the traditional–modern framework and then see how they are purified.

The video continues with Chelsea doing a voiceover describing the various stations as we see shots of students participating. First, she says, there is a demonstration of making biscuits “the old-timey way” and then a demonstration of cow milking. In both of these, middle-aged women in period dress do the demonstrations. The station after this involves two teenage girls (the ones in Figure 10 above) who “teach children about the lifetime chores that were done every day.”

Once Chelsea finishes her description, the video’s male narrator focuses briefly on the lunch break. “Mrs. Chelsea and her crew” of women in period dress are shown serving children hotdogs on paper plates. We see one woman apply a condiment to a
young girl’s hotdog (Figure 12) and then a shot of the schoolchildren sitting with parents and teachers at picnic tables underneath the pecan trees.

The video concludes with a mention of post-lunch hayrides. We see a dozen schoolchildren sitting on hay stacked on a hay wagon. James is standing, holding the reins as a team of two horses pull the wagon. “Before leaving, everyone is treated to an old-fashioned hayride,” the narrator says. “What a great way to end a wonderful day on the farm.” As the camera follows the wagon, it passes by a parked four-wheeler, and the narrator concludes: “If a little work, a lot of fun, and experiencing a lifestyle which helped to keep our country fed sounds interesting to you, the Vardaman Farmstead just might be the place you’re looking for.”

*Figure 12. Screenshot of Lunchtime. “Pioneer” dress and hot dog condiments make for a hybrid between tradition and modernity.*

This final portion of the video exposes more of these hybrids. The lunch seems to be a break from the experience of an authentic past because of the food choices (although, technically, hot dogs existed in the past). Chelsea highlighted the tension
between capturing the past and being practical when commenting on an earlier version of this thesis. The hot dog lunches were a choice aligned more with practicality than with being an accurate representation of the past. It would be too impractical to try complete accuracy. “Can you imagine,” she asked me, “what a nightmare it would be to give fifty glasses of milk to fifty school children?”

From Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective, though, the farmstead itself had a role to play as an access point to the past, which worked against the conception of such a break in the minds of participants. Although it was a working farm in that practical choices were made to keep it running, the video’s narrator is primed to keep the authenticity going by maintaining its role. This is why he does not frame the lunch as a break, characterizing it instead as part of the experience by relating it to “living and working on a farm” as it “requires a lot of energy and energy building requires food.” The narrator also ignores the presence of the four-wheeler in that shot of the hayride, which he characterizes as “old fashioned” because the hay wagon is pulled by horses instead of through a motor.

From this video, we can see that a primary method of purification was to classify things into the traditional category if they had any recognizable element intended to access or evoke the past. However, it may be unfair to make generalizations about purification from this video, as it is understandable that the narrator would be motivated to fit things within the traditional category for the purposes of the video.

Because I knew these tours were a locus for overt demonstrations of the traditional–modern framework, I decided to observe one in person. The video leaves open some question about how the participants take in the “working farm” aspect and
The school tour I observed took place in mid-October of 2012. The students were from a private Christian school in Hattiesburg. The students numbered several dozen, and they were driven there by three teachers and maybe a dozen parents. As one of the parents explained to me, the students were in the process of reading *Sarah Plain and Tall*, a historical novel set on a late-nineteenth-century prairie farm. The tour was expected to give a richer understanding of the book. Once they had all arrived and sufficiently congregated around the front of the general store, one of the teachers blew a whistle and raised her hand as a signal for the kids to quiet down and pay attention.

“Ok, guys, we are ready to start,” James said. He was standing at the steps with his parents and another woman who would be acting as a tour guide.

“Hello, everyone,” James said. “I’m James Vardaman. Welcome. What grade are y’all in?”

The kids shouted out, “Third.” He nodded.

“This is my farm. Me and my parents, we do a little bit of everything. This is where we get up every morning, where we live and work.” He asked them if they were excited about getting out of class. They were.

He then laid out some ground rules

“First, please don’t chase the chickens. It scrambles the eggs. Second, please don’t be cruel to the animals because it’s not nice. Third, stay with your group.”

Because of the dangers the larger animals posed, he explained a process by which
students could approach horses, with group leaders granting permission. It was clear by this that they did not want the kids to get hurt accidentally at the farm.

James then deferred to Chelsea, who divided up the classes into three groups. Each group got a “tour guide” who moved their groups from station to station in such a way that there would be only one group at a given station at a time. As Chelsea spoke to Henry’s group (Henry was the other tour guide), she said to pay attention to him, “Now, Mr. Henry don’t talk loud, so you have to stand close. But what he has to say is really important.”

The presence of hybrids during the tour became apparent even at the first station that I went to, which was with James at the barn.

“We have a tractor,” he said as I caught up with the tour group, “but we use horses to show people how things used to be and how things still are in many places around the world.” As he brought out one of the horses, he began preparing a harness, which he explained “has been around I don’t know how long” and that it allows humans to take a draft animal and have it “do something technical.”

The clarification that people still use draft horses complicates the presentation of horses as a past-oriented activity. While James was not specific about who else used horses, he could have pointed to others in the area, his Amish contacts in northern Mississippi and Ohio, or even people in Europe who used animals. The hybridity comes out more strongly with the presence of a tractor, which led the participants to focus on the use of animals in the field, rather than in the entire farmstead, as the traditional practice of note.
Another hybrid arose at the back, where I was standing with the parents. A woman holding an apple core asked Chelsea about a trash can. Chelsea said she could just throw it somewhere on the ground, since it was “recyclable.” In the woman’s experience, her modern sensibilities had her seeing an apple core as something to be discarded in an appropriate recepticle. In guiding her to an understanding of the farm as traditional or natural, Chelsea used modern jargon.

More hybrids arose a little while later with Chelsea at the milking demonstration. She got a rag and dipped it in a mixture of disinfectant and water and wiped the cow’s udder with it. She explained that it was important to clean it before milking and clarified that the “old folks” did not use any disinfectant.

“We do that because we got so many germs nowadays,” she said.

The cow was low on milk, as she had already been milked earlier, so there was little to show in the demonstration and not much opportunty for any of the kids to try out milking for themselves.

Both the use of disinfectant and the inability to milk the cow go back to the working aspect of the farm. For their milk to be usable, it must adhere to modern standards of cleanliness, which makes the Vardamans’ milking practices another hybrid. Even though they knew that there would be a milking demonstration, they did not save enough of the milk because the real-world constraints of the farm were more important than the touristy part of the farm. Or the cow could have just been particularly dry that day.

One girl who got to milk the cow went to her mother and cleaned her hands with Germ-X. She said that she did not want to drink milk for the rest of the day.
The issue of the tractor came up more overtly at the next station, when James was getting ready to demonstrate with the disking machine in the north field. He sat in the machine, and the two horses hooked to it stood waiting for his commands. As students congregated at the fence, he explained that he had let grass grow on the field for a while and had even distributed some used horse bedding from the barn as fertilizer. The disking machine cuts into the ground to mix the organic matter up into the soil. Eventually, he would plow the land to cover it up in a way that accelerates the decomposition and then put long sheets of plastic mulch over it to retain moisture before planting onions that would be sold at local farmers markets.

When a parent asked if he used a tractor, he was not clear at first about when and how they used the tractor.

“So this is just for show,” she said, indicating to the field and the horses.

Although he responded in an easygoing way, it seems like correcting this misunderstanding was important for James because his livelihood depended on both the perception and the appreciation that his farming methods were authentic. He explained that the tractor was just for moving things. They used horses when working the land, and it made sense to use them consistently because horses like having a comfortable routine.

“The more you use the horses,” he said, “the more you enjoy it.”

The woman nodded, satisfied.

While this scene reveals another hybrid (the use of plastic mulch, a practice that is closely associated with mechanized agriculture), I focus on this misunderstanding because it exposes another aspect of purification, one that involves an interplay between impression management and navigating the traditional–modern framework. As
mentioned in the fourth chapter, Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective has actors cooperating with the audience to maintain a definition of the situation. When an actor (in this case, James) defines the situation, other participants are compelled to help manage impressions by accepting the definition uncritically. So, in this case, the woman was easily satisfied, and no one asked about the plastic sheets.

The rest of the tour exhibited a few more unsurprising hybrids. Chelsea showed the children a plug-in egg incubator made from Styrofoam, and the lunch was similar to the video’s presentation, the primary difference being the use of the store’s kitchen (the store was built after the video was made) to make better meals.

Relationship to the Past

A framework like the traditional–modern one can allow for a sort of semantic space for tradition to be constructed and reconstructed (Donham 2002). While this school tour reveals aspects of hybrid-formation and purification, there is more to navigating the traditional–modern framework than just enforcing this binary; participants in the Vardaman family’s community used value judgments to inform how they oriented themselves within this framework.

Both Chelsea and James reiterated this when commenting on an earlier version of this thesis. Chelsea stressed that their choices reflected a desire to be true to themselves. James added to this by pointing out that their choices, whether it was the use of plastic mulch or Styrofoam containers, were not necessarily “conscious” in the sense of being the result of overt or deliberate reflection on who they were or what they valued. The unconscious or nonreflective nature of their choices meant that it felt like they were doing
“just what was convenient at the time or what was available at the time” in order to “keep the big picture from crashing.”

This unconscious or unreflective nature then makes it difficult to corroborate the salience of these values. However, from my time with the Vardamans, it seemed that they navigated the traditional–modern framework using the notion of loss; that is, a primary navigational value involved the idea of a rupture in the past and its accompanying loss in authenticity.

Rupture

The very idea of modernity as an essential category is built on the notion that non-European cultures were unchanged before contact or that even the idea of desiring newness is a result of contact with the West (Spitulnik 2002). In this conception of cultural change, modernity contrasts with tradition, with the former associated with improved standards of living but also global homogenization and even cultural inauthenticity. For non-Western peoples, this presumed rupture involves increased contact with the West; for Western peoples, including the Vardamans, the rupture involved a short period of rapid technological and sociological changes that restructured society.

In addition to this basic tendency across various cultures (particularly in Europe and the United States), I believe that there is a distinctly Southern approach to viewing past changes as involving a loss of something valuable. Watts (2008) identifies a “Lost Cause” strain of Southern identity that involves a sense of loss in relation to the Confederacy’s military defeat in the Civil War. Similarly, Ray (2001) puts forth that this sense of loss is an intrinsic part of Southern identity and that Southerners’ conception of
this loss is “the end of an aristocratic, privileged, and carefree world for people who valued the extended family and maintained a love of the land and a sense of place” (Ray 2001:184). In both cases, Southerners present a desire to recapture the admirable traits of an Old South.

For the Vardamans, this “confederate baggage” was replaced by a similar sense of loss from a more recent, twentieth-century rupture that involved technological and social changes. James touched on this when talking about the effect of technology on community. As he was telling me about a younger cousin of his who lived in rural Mississippi but had little exposure to farm life because of his time spent playing online games, James contrasted his cousin’s life with his own upbringing:

When I grew up, for better or for worse, you were part of the group...we lived kinda in a disconnected time ‘cause there was not a lot of outside influence dumped in on. I mean all of our dads grew up in that community and they didn’t bring a lot on the table, so to speak, other than what they knew... You had to be a part because that was the only thing there. There was no escaping. That was the basic bottom line. You had to do that. Or we all did. There was no technology to get away from. You could go sit at home, but how long would that last?

The rupture that James identified was the arrival of Internet and cell phone services that brought easy access to information from elsewhere. He explained that, while things had always changed over time, the ability to find instructional videos on YouTube or to use search engines like Google had changed “the whole process of how things change.” There is an important combination going on here, as this Southern sense of loss mixed with the adoption of new social technologies. These technologies were rarely rejected and instead became hybrids that were both accepted in their use while they were marked rhetorically as weak symbols for historical rupture.
As is clear from both Ray and Watts, what is identified in nostalgia for the past reveals what is presently valued. It should be no surprise, then, that what the Vardamans’ community identified as lost is similar to what Ray (2001) listed above as part of the Southern sense of loss. This was most intimately conveyed when the Vardamans discussed the general store. As James explained, the general store provided both a family-oriented environment, as well as a location that allowed for a love of the land and a sense of place:

One thing that we have seen that is interesting is people wanting to involve their families in something connected to the land and to regain a link to that. And that’s at our place. And at our store we set one of our goals is to try to help and support that idea that somebody and, no matter what it is, our children of this generation need a contact, they need a landmark.

This contact is something that James saw as having been lost as a result of a sort of corporate takeover of society that worked to undermine community connections. This was how he linked the sense of community with his farming; allowing people to maintain a connection between what they eat and where it comes from fostered an environment of interpersonal connectedness.

The Vardamans seemed pretty confident that this desired environment was in effect. Combined with the slow pace of how things were done at the store, the farm and the general store were turned into a sort of nostalgia-plus. Rather than just evoking nostalgia for the past, Vardaman spaces restored things from the past that they felt should not have been lost. This restoration could give the feeling among participants that the past had been brought back to life. These participants were then primed to view things as traditional as they purified the hybridity of the environment.

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9 The exception to this similarity in my coverage is aristocracy and privilege. While it is arguable that these are also parts of the sense of loss, particularly as it relates to class and race, these elements were not part of my research focus.


**Authenticity**

Modernity relates to authenticity in the part of the modernist narrative that involves a loss of both nature and culture. An easy way to see this, particularly with the Vardamans’ AFN activities, is to understand how this dynamic manifests in tourism. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the cultural tourist can take value in accessing lost authenticity, which closely matches the aspects of loss inherent in modernity mentioned above. In the sense that modernity is perceived as a Western pursuit of progress or technology with a concomitant loss of authenticity, the effort to produce authenticity through acts of production and reproduction then gives its objects a restored authenticity, leading to evaluations of “quality” in tourist sites influenced by perceived authenticity (Taylor 2001).

Sims (2009) also notes the connection between desires for the traditional, the local, and the authentic. In her interview data of a farmers market in the UK, she observes that local food provides an opportunity to detect authenticity. Part of this includes preconceived notions of authentic food experiences of a particular place (such as setting or ambiance) that may even supercede the more rational desires for healthy food, so the authenticity that participants find satisfying is one characterized by a combination of locality and tradition. This desire for authenticity is most important, she says, when people feel they live in a world alienated from nature.

This touristic desire for authenticity was an intrinsic part of experiencing the Vardaman family spaces. This was a clear contrast between the Vardaman farmstead and the recreation of a nineteenth-century village located in a neighboring town. When people would bring up the other place, the Vardamans pointed out that theirs was a
working farm while the village was, as the woman at the school tour said, “just for show.”

A notable way that this desire for authenticity manifested was when journalists would come to write pieces for magazines or newspapers. It was apparently common for them to come to the farm with a misunderstanding of the Vardamans’ goals and practices, thinking that they were trying to live in the past or that their production was completely natural or sustainable.

I experienced something like this the first week of my stay with the Vardamans. A reporter from a local newspaper showed up to interview myself and the other students for a feature article. When she sat me down, she asked, “What was the hardest thing to give up?” She pointed out how I had “no air conditioner, no indoor plumbing.” She was thinking of the cabins that we slept in, but we were sitting in the general store with air conditioning and running water. It turned out that she was under the impression that our goal was to live a simple life without modern conveniences.

I explained that we were learning about the Vardamans, trying to understand their way of life, not trying to experience past lifeways. Still, when I told her that I had not brought a computer and that my cell phone did not get good reception on the farm, she said, “I’m so spoiled. I just think it would be so hard for me to not have a computer and not have a signal.”

A few weeks later, her article appeared in the newspaper: “Remember Grandma and Grandpa telling stories of the ‘good ole’ days’?” it begins. “Anthropology students

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10 My thesis director was also primed to focus on the out-of-contact nature of my stay at the Vardaman farm, even though they all had working cell phones and the store had a strong Wifi signal.
from the University of Southern Mississippi are working to understand what that way of living really meant.”

In the article, our stay at the Vardaman farm is described as an attempt to “experience a piece of turn of the twentieth century life at the Vardaman General Store.” The expectation of authenticity stands out most strongly when the Vardamans are described as having “a unique connection to a nearly forgotten time.” The Vardamans, she says, “wake up before sunrise to eat breakfast, feed the chickens, maintain the farm using horse-drawn equipment, bake fresh bread daily and sing old Southern songs for entertainment.”

The article represents the reporter’s juggling of her impression of the Vardaman farm as being an authentic recreation of past practices and the attempts by myself and the other students to clarify that we were not trying to access that past ourselves. As is apparent in the article’s presentation, she believed it to be unlikely that we would not be accessing the past by learning from the Vardamans.

James told me of a more drastic experience with a woman who came to write a piece about their farm for a magazine. When she showed him what she had written to make sure it was accurate, it characterized the farm as being completely natural and completely sustainable. It was so far from what they were actually doing that he told her not to publish the piece. “I don’t even know where she got all that,” he said. It was flattering but, because it was misleading, it would prompt people to come to the farm and be disappointed.

James also reiterated in commenting on my findings that this notion of them of trying to perfectly recapture the past is a misperception. Whether or not he would have a
cell phone with him while working with horses did not violate his goals. “To me,” he said, “it has to do with keeping alive something that is more than just a picture. It’s something that you can’t see. It’s a craft and you can’t see it.” So, when people came and saw the past coming alive, there was a chance that they might expect a purer, more accurate representation of the past that the Vardamans would necessarily fall short of.

While James stressed that their intention was not to perfectly capture the past, it was still clear that an evocation of the past was a normal response to what they did. Even Chelsea and Henry could not help but describe the stay by myself and the other students in their cabins in a way similar to the reporter’s. “They living primitive,” Henry said to one person about it. In the months afterwards, as I continued to visit, I noticed that they would exaggerate the experience. At first, they just focused on how I slept in one of the cabins during July (summers in Mississippi are typically hot and humid), but they eventually came to tell people that I had had no electricity and no running water.

Both of these incidents highlight the synthesis between impression management and purification; the Vardamans saw the importance of narrative craft in managing impressions. James perceived the magazine story as misleading because it characterized their practices as completely pure and natural when he saw them as a mix of traditional and modern; in other words, the writer had purified in a way that he felt would mislead readers. Because the cabins were normally used in activities designed to access the traditional, my use of them merely as a place to sleep was foreign enough to Chelsea and Henry that they preferred to frame my use of them to more closely fit with this normal usage so that the cabins could maintain their role as artifacts.
This synthesis of purification and impression management can reframe the incident described in the previous chapter, when Chelsea urgently wanted to cover up the box with the name of a distant country. While purification can put many hybrids in the traditional category, the obvious non-locality of the items in this box would likely have people categorize them as modern. This put Chelsea in a difficult situation because she wanted her store to be perceived in a manner consistent with her private sense of self, yet also did not want to get rid of a popular item. Her solution was to reduce the chance of people learning where the item came from.

Conclusion

The traditional–modern framework that the Vardamans utilized is one in which objects are classified into one of two categories, despite characteristics that complicate such classification. With Latour’s help, we can see that purifying these hybrids so that they fit in either the traditional or the modern category occurs as a social act, with the Vardamans leading the way as de facto experts and defining the situation to indicate to others how to conceive of their practices.

As long as this definition was accepted and the hybrids were purified, the Vardamans were successful at managing impressions, though such purification could come at odds with AFN movement efforts to resist appropriation, which would only give the appearance of alterity. Some things could be characterized as sustainable when they actually were not and the more knowledgeable sustainability-minded participants might see this as a false claim of sustainable alterity. The failure to convincingly define the situation in this way was probably the most tangible form of lost business for the Vardamans. I have only been exposed to a handful of people who resisted purification of
the Vardamans’ practices toward the traditional, and in those instances they treated the hybridity as a form of pollution that ruins the authenticity. Similarly, one farmers market shopper privately expressed offense at another vendor’s description of a drink as having “no sugar added” when she knew that they used artificial sweeteners.

There were a number of additional hybrids that I encountered, such as the Amish company that designed, produced, and sold horse-drawn machines for the Vardamans; although the equipment was horse-drawn, they were still interested in innovation to make things better, cheaper, or more efficient. While the real working farm involved feeding animals and growing crops in traditional ways, both James and his parents had homes on the farm with modern conveniences—washing machines, cable television, Internet—that made them indistinguishable from the interiors of homes elsewhere. The daily lunches may have featured home-style cooking and been served in a store with hard-to-find goods, but the ingredients were a mixture of local foods, food grown on the Vardaman farmstead, and food bought at Sam’s Club (a chain of retail stores selling wholesale items).

The greatest hybrid, though, was the larger context. As Chelsea put it, if she were to make the farm a perfect recapturing of the past, they would not be able to use FedEx. Taking on practices considered traditional occurred within a larger economic system that prioritized efficiency, mechanization, and long distribution chains. They were also doing so to cater to a demographic of consumers that sought out or appreciated the sense of authenticity that comes from traditionally-grown foods or spaces that reflect rural values. Taking on formerly typical production methods is atypical in a contemporary setting, and doing so is a deliberate choice that connects producers to relatively new AFN markets.
and scrutiny related to cultural conceptions of authenticity, making it impossible to act in ways that are a perfect reproduction of past practices.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the fourth and fifth chapters, I made the case that the Vardamans used space and rhetoric for the purpose of impression management. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that those in their community were primed to view their practices as authentically traditional, although the Vardamans did not consider their primary goal to be recapturing the past. In the following sections, I wrap up my coverage of the Vardamans by exploring how these things assisted them in thriving economically within the context of the AFN movement. I then reflect on the experience and note potential areas of further research.

Regard

The Vardamans were very good at building interpersonal relationships through their economic activities. This actually helped them thrive economically, not only because it helped others see them as friendly and helpful, but also because such relationships felt more meaningful than typical economic interactions. Sage (2001) characterizes the personal relationships intrinsic to short supply chains—such as with farmers markets—as part of an economy of regard, which involves some sort of sacrifice made by the consumer in exchange for “insight into the production system, status and identity associated with the consumption of a good with limited distribution, and enhanced expertise” (2001:3). Small-scale producers, he says, are much more mindful of their customers’ idiosyncrasies and work to build up this form of customer loyalty because they depend on it much more than larger or more distanciated producers.
This economy of regard is a good way to view the Vardamans’ impression management strategies. As Chelsea explained to me sitting behind her booth one day, a vendor at a farmers market must consider whether to prioritize “product” or “personality.” That is, whether to concentrate on making products that she knew people would want to buy or on showing herself to be the kind of producer that they would feel comfortable giving business to. When I suggested that people came to the market with a desire for certain kinds of products and then stayed because of this “personality,” she agreed.

Although it is clear that the close, personal interactions with shoppers were an opportunity to project an image that allowed the customers to feel trust in the product, it is hard to say what it was that worked the most for people. This “personality” aspect may have been something as simple as being friendly and helpful, though it could be tied more with issues of trust and authority. Based on surveys of UK farmers market shoppers, Kirwan (2004) points out that customers may integrate the trust in the product with the social relationship that they develop. Perhaps people felt that maintaining a link between the product and the producer was a preferable form of assessment.

It is important to remember that the farmers markets like the ones the Vardamans participated in are neoliberal economic environments in the sense that consumers are expected to use their own investigative abilities to make judgments about production. The use of personal trust as a form of assessment would make the work easier for both consumer and producer. It would then be easier for consumers because they did not have to learn about the specifics of production or complicated ecological considerations and it
would be easier for vendors because they would not have to do a lot of work talking about these things once interpersonal trust had been established.

The store had a similar focus on personality, though in this case it was less about neoliberal assessment and more about creating an atmosphere. Personality, in the context of the store, would make or break the traditional feel that the Vardamans were going for and that people were attracted to.

Tradition

Another important element is the way the Vardamans used tradition rhetorically to position themselves as dispensers of authenticity. In this way, their produce became secondary to the environment or the feel they gave off. Other scholars have noted the dynamic between tradition and modernity, assessing it in a different way than I have. This difference may have something to do with the common focus on non-Western peoples. Knauft (2002b) focuses on the Gebusi of Melanesia in arguing that tradition and modernity codefine each other by remaining distinct. In his lens of “oxymodernity,” the Vardaman family would be seen as balancing a position within the traditional–modern binary without redefining the boundary between the two.

As I have shown, however, the hybrid territory that violates these conceptual binaries allowed them to do just that. Their economic vitality depended on the conceptual binaries because people were drawn to their traditional nature when they perceived downsides to modernity. The Vardamans’ authority in defining the situation allowed them to guide other participants into viewing more practices as traditional than they otherwise might and to accepting hybrid practices as traditional when they were imperfect recreations of the past. Knauft characterizes the “reinvention of tradition” as
something done to deal with the modern condition for the Gebusi; this seems to parallel
the touristic desire for capturing the past that I mentioned earlier, though Knauft’s Gebusi
are more oriented towards a sort of neotradition that is used primarily for performance
and therefore deliberately inauthentic or ironic while the Vardamans used tradition in a
manner considered by participants to be authentic or sincere.

Holloway et al. (2006), mentioned in the previous chapter, also touch on tradition
and modernity in a relevant way in regard to the use of rhetoric in relation to modernity.
Holloway et al. characterize the rhetoric surrounding their Italian farm as decidedly “anti-
modern” as it links a return to tradition with moral improvement. This rhetoric causes the
authors to see their main informant’s utilization of the Internet as “ironic” (or
incongruous) because global connections via the Internet foster global distribution that
violates the local-ness and sustainability that is its foundation.

However, just as the Vardamans were practical in the ways they navigated
tradition and modernity, Holloway et al.’s main informant has a higher concern than
simply whether she is accurately reproducing past practices. In the Italian farmer’s case,
*tradition* is a stand-in for a meta-identity that links environmental concerns and
sustainability with particular farming practices. Technology that fosters this kind of care
for the land and for people is consistent with both the ethics that she espouses and with a
business practice oriented toward going against the ethics of the conventional food
system, potentially undermining it in the process. For the Vardamans, *tradition* is a
similar stand-in for their identity; in this way, *tradition* does not denote a level of
technology or even part of a temporal progression, but instead reflects a reconnection to
practices or beliefs that the Vardamans value. Thus, newer technology that fostered this
sense of tradition or could otherwise be made consistent with it became a useful hybrid, rather than an ironic practice or one that spoiled the sense of authenticity.

**Alterity**

Finally, the Vardamans’ economic success rested on the ability to convince others that they were sufficiently alternative from the conventional food system. It is unclear exactly how farmers market shoppers measure alterity, though it seems that there is an overlap between tradition and sustainability as those desiring a more sustainable food system tend to assume that natural is better, that traditional methods are more natural, and that food should return to a more natural state. Because of this overlap, the Vardamans were able to present themselves in a consistent way when they operated in contexts where both conservative and liberal consumers were to use their own judgments to determine whether they were authentic; their emphasis on the traditional or natural character of themselves and their production methods thus fits with both interests.

While the exact nature of shoppers’ conception of alterity is unclear (and probably different from person to person), synthesizing the parameters provided by Venn et al. (2006) and Jarosz (2008) can help us see that the Vardamans were able to easily convey much of this alterity through their participation in farmers markets. For one thing, farmers markets are economic spaces that reconnect consumers with producers. While the Vardamans themselves were pretty light in their discussion of this reconnection in terms of social or political change, it was clear that they appreciated farmers markets for their ability to help them interact with consumers of their produce, respond to their needs at an interpersonal level, and participate in the community.
Direct selling works hand-in-hand with shorter supply chains; ventures like farmers markets also allow for bypassing intermediaries like supermarkets. Bypassing in this way engages consumers, but it also allows for direct selling to restaurants (Starr et al. 2003). In my time with the Vardamans, I witnessed this occur in two different ways. The first involved a chef or representative of a restaurant coming to the market and buying goods like any other shopper. In another case, a man gave his contact information to farmers market vendors for the purpose of establishing direct selling for a restaurant that touts itself as local and sustainable. The Vardamans came to have an arrangement with this restaurant where they brought deliveries of produce (mostly tomatoes) directly to this restaurant as long as they had enough to sell to them; James made it clear to me that he thought the venture would not be very feasible in the off season. “When our tomatoes are done growing,” he said to me one day, “they’re still gonna need ‘em.”

This act of coming to a farmers market and networking with producers was something that occurred with enough frequency that it seemed farmers markets—The Downtown Hattiesburg Farmers Market in particular—were a place for participation in broader AFN community activities. One regular shopper once went around in an attempt to get better food for a local daycare; another got James to speak at a sustainability group’s monthly meeting. It seems, then, that participation in farmers markets involves more than just showing up, as there are principles that keep shoppers coming and vendors selling. These principles primed the Vardamans to put themselves out as producers of quality characterized by a combination of taste, health, and environmental sustainability, with the produce being described in terms of taste and their production methods as natural or sustainable. This synthesis of food and community at farmers markets allowed
for producers and consumers to be reconnected while avoiding normal, corporate-controlled food chains, and by invoking tradition as a way to indicate quality produce, trustworthiness, and local community connections.

Reflexivity

In the third chapter, I detailed a “member checking” phase that involved sharing my findings with the Vardamans as an attempt to establish the trustworthiness of my findings. I wanted to weave their commentary into the narrative both as a sort of verificatory process (with the Vardaman members themselves becoming overt verifiers) and to promote the ways that ethnographic research is like a conversation.

As I explained earlier, member checking is a good way of making sure that my findings reflect the Vardamans’ social reality before publication. In this lens, the member checking interviews I conducted accomplished this task and allowed me to revise with greater confidence in my conclusions. In particular, the main objection they raised was that my analysis in the chapter on modernity seemed too critical, and the Vardamans, Chelsea in particular, felt that I was presenting them as deceptive. I have subsequently revised that chapter to make it clearer that their intention is not to trick people into purifying hybrids in ways that favor them economically, but that purification exposes what elements of the past are important to the Vardamans and those in their community.

One important lesson from this member checking experience, particularly in regard to promoting a dialogue, relates to the ways a social researcher might influence his or her subject. My understanding of social research, particularly in regard to the relationship between the knower and knowledge—what Guba and Lincoln (1994) call the “epistemological question”—is that findings in social science are created as part of the
process of investigation and are mediated by the values that a researcher cannot avoid putting into an investigation. Closely related to this, though, is the impact that the study itself may have on those being observed. Although the findings are inherently dialogic, I believe that the impact should be minimal. An astronomical analogy might help illuminate my position. A common understanding about orbital dynamics is that moons orbit planets and planets orbit stars, as if the more massive body stays still in reaction to the mass of its satellite. In actuality, the two bodies orbit together around a common barycenter or center of mass so that the more massive body still moves. My view of social science is similar in that I see it as involving the researcher and the researched orbiting around each other. The barycenter is the findings of ethnographic research so that the smaller the researcher’s metaphorical mass, the closer to the research subject’s social reality. This means the researcher should try to reduce his or her own metaphorical mass so that the influence is small.

Because of this view, I first began my research with a conscious desire to have very little influence on the Vardamans. I was worried that, in addition to my own subjectivity painting my perceptions, I might say or do things that would alter how the Vardamans did things or characterized their behaviors and thus “spoil” the research by making it more about myself (a view that is not exactly constructivist). As my time with them continued and as I gained a more sophisticated sense of the constructivist lens of social research, I gained more confidence in the Vardamans’ ability to remain themselves even as they interacted with someone with a different perspective and became less concerned about undue researcher influence.
However, the issue came to mind again during the member checking interviews when Chelsea mentioned that she and James had decided to take a firmer position against using herbicides or chemicals. It was not worth it, she said, not simply because they could not claim to be chemical free, but also because it did not feel true to who they were. It was not something that would condemn them to hell, but it would still weigh on their conscience when they went to sleep at night. I was immediately reminded of the part of the fourth chapter where I mentioned James’s struggle between environmental sustainability and economic survivability that resulted in him using a weak herbicide. When James said that the draft of my findings prompted him to rethink how he handled his business, I realized that the passage in question may have been the reason that they decided to take this firmer stance against chemicals.

It might seem that I would react with dread at having prompted the Vardamans to do something they might not have done otherwise, but I actually do not see it as that much of a problem. The influence that my findings may have had in prompting this decision did not change who they were and likely gave them some clarity in reflecting on how to live according to their own principles and sense of self. In a way, the passage in question was like holding up a mirror.

I mentioned in the first chapter that my approach has been reflexive in the sense that I wish to disembled the notion that my voice—the voice of the researcher—is more authoritative than others. It is not just that I do not wish to have the final say, but that the Vardamans’ voices should be potent in a work about them. Lawless (1992) argues that the dialogue between the researcher and research subjects should be foregrounded for the reader so that the reader can see how the subjects contributed or altered the scholar’s
thinking. In her own case, she had fielded the facts of her informants’ life stories, but she later regretted not also sharing her interpretations with them before publishing her findings. By not getting their interpretations of her interpretation, she stalled the dialogic nature of her research to post-publication, when they told her what they thought of her book.

This desire of diminishing my own rhetorical authoritativeness prompted me to anticipate that the member checking exercise would generate feedback that would allow me to weave their feedback into subsequent drafts of my findings. This expectation was also fueled Timothy Asch, a documentarian who would record participant feedback of his films and incorporate it in the final product (Asch and Asch 1995). Asch’s style is to allow the participants to speak for themselves and, if I could do something similar for my own thesis, then the Vardamans’ own voices would come through much stronger.

However, things did not go as I had hoped. One of the participants, Henry, did not get around to reading the draft of my findings when it came time to talk about them. He may have been intimidated by the length of the document (almost seventy pages) or discouraged by Chelsea’s initial reactions to things she did not like. When I considered giving Henry more time to respond, James persuaded me that it would not be worthwhile, since Henry was more passive in terms of the decisions the three of them made and would have little to contribute in terms of assessing claims or commenting on them.

On top of this, while Chelsea and James provided important feedback during the member checking interviews, their feedback did not lend itself to extensive quotations like I had hoped. For the most part, their comments were more general and focused on their overall assessments. This meant that the process did not generate the kind of quotes
I was hoping to pepper throughout the thesis; there are a handful of references to the Vardamans’ responses to my findings, but fewer than I was thinking. This doesn’t mean that the member checking was a failure, just that it was different than I had expected in that my thesis does not present its trustworthiness as overtly and transparently as I had hoped and may not work to disembed my own voice from the seat of authority in the way that I wished.

I would like to think that my approach, although imperfect, contributed to the dialogic nature of ethnographic research. In that sense, I was not working to verify my conclusions, but instead continuing the conversation both pre- and post-publication. The idea of the scholar’s voice having paramount authoritativeness was something that I tried to discourage during the member checking interviews. At one point, when she was flipping through her copy of the findings to identify something she had found particularly problematic, Chelsea stopped and said, “It’s okay. I’m fine now.” I encouraged her to find the section so that I could address the issue in subsequent drafts. Several other times, she would stop her train of thought by saying, “You can write whatever you want.” Each time, I encouraged her to provide feedback, even if it meant that I would have to change things. Although I was oriented towards elevating their voices, it seemed that they were primed to appeal to me as an authority on them simply because I was the writer, and I was thinking about things that they normally approached less analytically.

Still, I can see how I have imperfectly achieved this dialogic nature despite my intentions. Can I really say that my voice is equal to those of the Vardamans when I have creative control of my thesis and when they have little institutional authority over me in the publication process? Even though I encouraged more than a simple yes/no response
to my findings, there was still clearly a bias in favor of my own authoritativeness, one that runs towards knowledgeable or educated people in general. Even the structure and tone of my thesis—with academic language and long-winded philosophical theorizing that is inherent in scholarly writing as I have learned it—is an additional hurdle for this dialogic nature as it can be an impediment for a lay reader to contribute to the conversation. Even though I believe that the Vardamans are equal to myself, my presentation is an imperfect reflection of that belief as a result of deep-seated biases about writing and the privilege of scholarly voices. There is only so much I can do to unseat the authority of my own voice; I may not want to speak for the Vardamans but, by going for a translation of their worldview, I really am.

Further Research

There is still much to be discovered in regard to Alternative Food Networks in the American South. My own research has been a case study of one family. In addition to expanding the inquiry with similar studies of other farms in the area or in nearby areas, there are some other avenues of further research.

One potentially revealing aspect of AFN activities is the culture of farmers markets in the area. It would be enlightening to conduct research similar to Kirwan (2004), Holloway and Kneafsey (2000), and Sims (2009)—studies of farmers markets in the United Kingdom—that focuses on farmers markets in the American South from the perspective of shoppers. Similarly, there might be something to looking at the way people become acculturated into local AFN movement activities. One might be attracted to participate because of health concerns and eventually acquire other concerns—such as environmental impact, animal ethics, and support of local producers—through some
process of acculturation. An interesting guide to viewing this process of acculturation comes from the cultural script model as outlined in Goddard (2000) and Wierzbicka (1996). In the cultural script model (which I came across too late to apply to my own research here), cultural ideologies work to shape people’s behavior, their assumptions, and their expectations through prescriptive rules for thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting.

Other research may help to provide more global generalizations about AFN communities. Based on some of the literature and my own research, there are some tendencies that appear worth investigating more thoroughly. These include the tendency for participants to be motivated partly by religious or spiritual concerns, perceptions about authenticity, and the relevance of modernity in relation to AFN practices. Future research may also approach these questions in terms of politics, revealing how the demographics of farmers markets might or might not reflect local political demographics and the differences between more conservative and more liberal shoppers or markets. Further research along these lines may find that the issues of alterity and appropriation are less relevant than issues of power, class, or identity.

This further research would expand on the dialogic nature of ethnographic research; as Titon (1988) articulates it, dialogue that begins pre-publication expands post-publication with responsive discourse from researchers’ colleagues and readers. In this sense, the thesis that lies before you is but one piece of the ever-expanding, ever-refining puzzle about peoples, beliefs, and behaviors.
APPENDIX A

RESEARCH PROPOSAL SENT TO IRB

Draft Animal Agriculture in Perry County, Mississippi

Project Goals: The main goal is a case study of a family of small-scale farmers in Mississippi’s Piney Woods. The family under study carries several roles, including local farming, vending at farmers markets, organizing a large annual festival, and running a general store. This project aims to understand how this family negotiates between these roles in their community so that they combine them into a consistent image while being able to survive economically. The research conducted will culminate in a master’s thesis.

Protocol: PI has been operating under a previous protocol entitled “Piney Woods Ethnographic Fieldwork” (Protocol Number: 11060202) set to expire at the end of August 2012. Procedures involve ethnographic fieldwork in the Piney Woods. This includes a family farm located in Perry County, Mississippi, as well as local farmers’ markets. PI will keep qualitative fieldnotes, which may be shared or vetted among the subject family (to see if PI correctly understands a local concept, technique, or attitude). Research is primarily with one family of farmers, though short visits with other contacts are also possible (for example, visiting the farm of another farmers market vendor or informal interviews with general store customers).

- PI will work primarily with 3 adult family members who own and operate a farm and general store on their property, a 40-acre homestead in Perry County, Mississippi. These subjects are long-term residents, are knowledgeable of the farming techniques in the Piney Woods area, and have been chosen based on their economic activities. Field methods include participant observation, interviewing, and content analysis.

1. Participant observation – A form of qualitative data collection, integral to the social sciences, aimed at gaining an intimate understanding of the cultural practices of a particular group. Through rapport-building with subjects, the participant observer gains access to information not readily available to outsiders.

2. Interviews – Interviewing in social sciences can vary in level of control over people’s responses. For this research, there are three primary forms of interviewing characterized by levels of control: informal, unstructured, and semistructured. None of the interview styles involves deception, as interviewees are to be given a clear idea of the interviewer’s intentions. When permission is granted, interviews may also be recorded on an electronic audio device with recordings subsequently being transcribed and then erased. For this study, the PI is the sole interviewer.
   a) Informal – characterized by a total lack of control. In form, informal interviewing is no different from having a conversation and then writing down what was said afterward.
   b) Unstructured – characterized by a clear plan in mind of the sorts of questions to be asked while still allowing interviewees to express themselves at their own pace and in their own terms.
   c) Semistructured – the same level of freedom as unstructured interviewing, but is based on a written list of questions and topics to be covered.

3. Content analysis – Close interpretation of texts that the subjects themselves read or write (e.g. periodicals, newsletters, advertisements). This is useful in identifying underlying themes, values, assumptions, principles, and the conventions or narrative mechanisms that are used to convey them. Content analysis is not limited to
linguistic phenomena, as it may also include an analytical approach to understanding, for example, the layout of intentionally designed spaces.

- The procedures will take approximately thirty hours of interviewing and participant observation, resulting in coded fieldnotes.
- Procedures will be conducted in the Piney Woods. Most of this will be at the family homestead, which is located in Perry County, Mississippi, and at local farmers markets.
- Special situations include anonymity of subjects, following the American Anthropological Association’s Ethics Guidelines (http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm), research must be conducted at a time convenient for the participants. Community members’ participation in the research is completely voluntary. If they decide to discontinue their participation, this will not result in any penalty or prejudice to the subject. Participants will be given the Principle Investigator’s contact information in the event they should need the name and phone number of whom to contact for answers to questions about the research.

**Benefits:** The potential benefits include identifying new areas of knowledge and detailing a snapshot of cultural ways that may be subject to change in response to external forces. The subject family is part of a larger group, rural southerners, that carries a stigma via negative stereotyping from the broader culture; this project may help undermine such a stigma, as coming to a better understanding and appreciation of other ways of life induces greater tolerance. The participating Piney Woods residents benefit more directly by having their lifeways documented in a way that is fair and consistent with their own self-presentation.

**Risks:** The PI will make every effort to minimize any risks, discomforts, or inconvenience to the participating subjects. PI will work with the subject family’s schedules.

- Each informant will be given a number code to protect their identity, using AAA’s code of ethics, section III, A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, and A6.
- Data will be kept in qualitative fieldnotes along ethical guidelines that protect informants to a very high standard. A copy of all fieldnotes will be kept in a secure location in the event the original fieldnotes are lost.
- The final disposition of data consists of a thesis. Upon completion of the writeup, electronic audio recordings will be destroyed; fieldnotes will be archived in a secure location accessible only to the PI, rather than destroyed, as said fieldnotes reflect the creative labor of the PI.

**Informed Consent:** will be conducted at the onset of the project. The PI will present a description of the project. This will be followed up with further descriptions of the project when working in the area. Informed consent will be obtained confidentially. Here is a draft of the informed consent form the host family will sign:
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology

Informed Consent

Please read the document carefully. Sign your name below only if you agree to participate and you fully understand your rights. Your signature is required for participation. You must be 18 years of age to give your consent to participate in research. If you desire a copy of this consent form, you may request one and it will be provided to you.

This study involves ethnographic research into the way people live in the piney woods. As a student of culture, I am trying to understand some of the things that you yourself may consider to be common sense. I will be participating in your daily routines and asking questions of you. At the same time, I will try not to be a burden to you but will do my best to fit into your routines. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary, which you may discontinue at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential and you will have the opportunity to review any paper that results from our discussions. If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at (559) 824-6731, or my thesis advisor Jeffrey Kauffman, in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, at the University of Southern Mississippi. His office phone number is (601) 266-6810.

“This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, Box 5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, (601) 266-6820.”

______________________________
Participant name

______________________________    _________________
Participant signature             Date

______________________________    _________________
Principal investigator signature  Date
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 12090505
PROJECT TITLE: Draft Animal Agriculture in Perry County, Mississippi
PROJECT TYPE: Thesis
RESEARCHER/S: Matthew Lance
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts & Letters
DEPARTMENT: Anthropology & Sociology
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: 09/25/2012 to 09/24/2013

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
APPENDIX C
MEMBER CHECKING LETTER

Chelsea, Henry, and James,

As you know, I have been writing about the three of you and what you do. What I’ve written is based on my experiences with you on the farm and elsewhere. It focuses mostly on how you present yourselves to others and how this relates to your economic vitality.

Here is a draft of my findings. This isn’t a final draft (not even close), but it does show how things seem to me based on what I’ve seen and heard. I may have made some errors in understanding. By getting feedback from the three of you, I give you all an opportunity to tell me what I’ve got right and what I’ve got wrong before I publish my final draft so that it’s not too late to change things.

I encourage you to take a pen to this draft. I have space on each page for written commentary. You can also write in the margins, on the back, and even between lines. You can cross things out, circle words and phrases, and draw faces. Nothing is sacred. Don’t feel like you have to write a lot, but the more you write, the more I have that I can work with when I rewrite for my next draft.

What I’m looking for from you is written comments that focus on three things:

- **Factual or interpretive errors** – Have I gotten anything wrong about what you do or why? Big things? Little things? How do my interpretations about what you do and why fit with your own interpretations?
- **Major concerns or issues** – Are there any parts that seem wrong or unfair? Are there any confusing parts? Are there things that might mislead a reader?
- **Overall credibility** – Do you think these findings get to how you see things? Do they represent what you do and why in a fair and truthful manner?

I’m looking for comments from the three of you individually, so it’s okay if your judgments are different from those of the others.

I would also like to stress that, although this draft uses your real names, the final, published draft will use fake names to protect your identity.

Once you finish reading this, we can sit down privately and talk about it. Let’s try to do this on ________________.

Matthew Lance
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