

From conservation heroes to climate villains – How changes in social recognition may contribute to changed identities of farmers

Lars Hallgren^a, Hanna Ljunggren Bergeå^a, Johan Ahnström^b and Helena Nordström Källström^a

^a*Unit of Environmental Communication, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, lars.hallgren@sol.slu.se, hanna.bergea@sol.slu.se, helena.kallstrom@sol.slu.se*

^b*Department of Biology & Animal Ecology, Lund University, johan.ahnstrom@zoekol.lu.se*

Abstract: *In this paper we discuss two different kinds of presentations of farmers (and farming) in the public media, and the effect that these presented pictures might have on the farmers' constitution of identity and motivation to take on environmental management measures. These two media-based presentations include: (a) farmers (and/or farming) as contributors to biodiversity and landscape heritage, and (b) farmers (and/or farming) as producers of climate change emissions. This discussion is founded in a general question concerning the role of identity, attribution, and recognition as factors which motivate individuals and groups for making environmental contributions. When farmers are presented with a media-produced identity that they, their animals, or their products are environmental villains there are three main coping strategies: (1) accept and admit the description of oneself as a villain, (2) deny the description of oneself as a villain, or (3) ignore the description of oneself as a villain. The consequence of an ambiguous representation of the social category "nature conservation farmer", which stems from the attribution of farmers as climate villains, might cause changes in social identification, and, ultimately, a reduced motivation to take on nature conservation and environmentally friendly activities.*

Keywords: *Farmers, Identity, Environmental Communication, Recognition, Climate Change*

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, an important trend within nature conservation in Sweden has been an effort to promote the production of cattle and sheep on semi-natural pastures. These producers, as well as their production methods and products, have been recognised and portrayed as important factors in Swedish biodiversity conservation. More recently, however, the media have presented an alternate image of these producers as well as their production methods and products. In 2006, the FAO published a report titled "*Livestock's Long Shadow*", which described cattle production as a major contributor to climate change due to high methane emissions.

These two opposing narratives of meat production contest each other, and it can be assumed that both induce a reaction from the media audience; including farmers. Swedish society expects farmers to contribute to sustainable development. As such, nature conservation projects and Agri-Environmental Schemes (AES) have been established to motivate farmers and to create incentives to manage semi-natural pastures. For example, one of the Swedish parliament's 16 environmental objectives is, "*a varied agricultural landscape*". This objective is quantitatively characterized in terms of total area of semi-natural pastures and meadows. To reach this target, Swedish farmers are obliged to direct payment from the EU and environmental subsidies to managing pastures, as well to restoring old pastures.

The narrative about the nature conservation farmer, however, has been increasingly challenged. For example, recent changes in the advertising campaigns of the second largest hamburger chain in Sweden, Max, illustrate a shift in the public's interpretation of meat production. The production policy of Max guarantees that all meat content within their products originates from Swedish animals. Previously in the restaurants, the message "Swedish beef and Swedish chicken" had been at the forefront of the company's advertising campaigns. Since May 2008, however, Max has shifted to present the relative CO₂

emissions from each product on the menu, while also advising customers who care about the environment and climate change to choose either chicken or fish alternatives. The main marketing/advertising message to the customers thus changed from *“we use Swedish meat”* to *“meat production and consumption is environmentally unfriendly”*. Max’s marketing manager explained that the company decided about the campaign after having seen the film *“An Inconvenient Truth”* by Al Gore, adding, *“our goal is not to compensate but to reduce our impact /.../. As part of our goals to reduce our impact, we chose to label all products in order to make it possible for the guests to make active choices. At the same time we gave “climate-smart” products more exposure”*. As such, our question is: Does this change in public presentation of farmers affect the farmers’ identity and motivation to take on environmentally related tasks? To understand the dynamic in the agro-environmental system it is crucial to understand what motivates farmers in their production and management decisions. To explore this question, we focus on social identity, self presentation, and attribution. Our focus on identity corresponds with the view that an individual is constituted through social interaction and relationships. This discussion is founded in a general question concerning the role of identity, attribution and recognition as factors which motivate individuals and groups to making environmental contributions.

Identity, attribution, self presentation and impression management

In order to understand the motivation behind farmers’ actions, our investigation is based within a theoretical framework grounded within the theory of symbolic interactionism. This framework assumes that an individual takes notice of – and interprets – the meaning of both herself and the action(s) of other social objects in a specific context/situation. According to Charon (2009) and the theory of symbolic interactionism *“/.../the cause of action is almost always definition /.../ How he or she defines the situation is central to how he or she acts in it”* (p 126). Thus, when defining a situation, the individual constitutes a context-specific definition of self. This includes giving herself an identity and attempting to establish (through action) a relation to a particular social category. Charon (2009) describes identity as *“the names we give ourselves”* (p 144). When talking about herself she draws connections to – or identifies with – a social group or a category of other actors; in our case, for example, “farmers”, farmers of a specific kind, and/or those she includes when she talks about “we” and “us” in a specific situation. The individual presents herself in relation to these other members of the social category she is identifying herself with, takes on action she associates with this particular category, and expects to be accepted on the basis of this self presentation i.e. the other actors will relate to her as someone with the entities she considers to be applicable/appropriate to this social group. The individual is also met with interpretations and descriptions of her social category made by other actors, and her self-definition is adjusted to these responses. Charon (2009) suggests that *“/.../creating identity is an active negotiation process between who others tell us we are and our continuous attempts to present who we think we are to others.”* (p 148).

Drawing a more specific parallel between this phenomenon and our case study, we can assume the individuals pursuing grazing-based livestock production to define themselves as belonging to social categories related to agriculture e.g. “farmers”, “beef meat producers”, “organic-”, “big and efficient-” or “Swedish-” farmers. The farmer might also have other identities like “ornithologist” or “parent”. Social categories overlap, implying that a farmer might identify herself with several of them. The choice of social category to affiliate with is situation dependent. When defining themselves in a context, members of a social category “farmers” take on action they expect a member of this category to pursue. This self-definition of e.g. “farmer” can be perceived to be a double-natured phenomenon which occurs via the convergence of two mutually occurring processes: i.e. the individual identifies herself with the social category of “farmer” based on personal observations/reflection towards her own action(s) as a “farmer”, while also taking on the action she associates with the social category of “farmer” she is attempting to identifying herself with. Her self-definition of “farmer” is also dependent on other actors’ interpretations

and attributions of this social category, as well as their willingness to accept her as a representative of the category. We can assume shifts in self-definition (or identity) to happen when dissonance occurs between the category members' own interpretation of a social category and other actors' definitions of this category. Thus, when an individual is considering which social category to associate herself with, which she does more or less every time she enters into a social situation, one important question for the individual appears to be: Does an affiliation with this social category offer recognition for myself? Recognition can be found in three independent modes (Honneth, 2000).

1. The individual is recognized as a person whose needs and performance are of unique value to another person.
2. The individual is recognized as a person who is ascribed the same moral accountability as every other human being.
3. The individual is recognized as a person whose capabilities are of constitutive value to a concrete community.

Considering the above, it can be assumed that when an actor is acting in a social situation and, through her action, presents herself as affiliated with a social category, she is (inexplicitly) evaluating to what extent this affiliation will create opportunities for her to be recognised as someone who is: (a) valuable and unique, (b) morally accountable, and (c) contributing to the constitution of the social category.

Attribution of a social category and its members is occurring through all kinds of social interaction – including close relationships with specific others, formal relations with representatives of institutions, as well as when the social category is described by the media. In this regard, identity is negotiated both in face-to-face situations as well as through the media. This indicates that media representations are not just important with regard to being present after an event, but also play a constitutive role (Pietikäinen, 2003). In contemporary society, news media is becoming more important with respect to being one of the most visible and significant arenas for identity construction (Pietikäinen, 2003), since news representations contribute to ways in which individuals see themselves (Hall, 1997). How people are represented in the news media has consequences for their lives, rights, and position in society (Hall, 1997). In addition, the tendency of the news media to overemphasise the homogenous nature within a minority group, might lead to detrimental generalisations for a group like farmers (Ter Wal, 2002). As Weeks (1994) points out, the struggle for identity of a group is also a struggle for the articulation of that identity in the media. A German study of farmers and environmental discourse in the media (McHenry, 1996) states that even if farmers do not agree with the positions taken in the paper it will still be important for the farmers' identification with the group of professionals. As such, being under attack unifies the group of farmers, although farmers are not the only ones blamed in the climate debate. However, being considered a minority group, research has proven minorities to be extra exposed and vulnerable to media images (Pietikäinen, 2003). Whether there are other groups equally affected is beyond the focus of the present research. In this article we are focusing on attributions of the social category "farmers" and its distinguishable subcategories in the media.

The aim with this article is to investigate how identity is constructed and re-constructed by self-presentations and presentation, and how social recognition might influence farmers' motivation to engage in nature conservation. We will analyze the images created in the media and reflect upon what effects identity dissonance might have on farmers' willingness to take on environmental management programs. The main discussion of the article is based on theoretical inquiry; however, in order to be able to depict these parallel identities in a more concrete manner, a search for texts published in media has been carried out to determine the specific images being presented in media. These results will also be discussed.

Method

To find articles that described different images of farmers, empirical material was collected. The words “meat from semi-natural pastures” (Swe naturbeteskött), “environmental hero” (Swe miljöhjälte), “environmental villain” (Swe miljöbov) and “climate” were used as the primary points of departure. We searched in internet search engines and the biggest Swedish daily newspapers. We also scanned through some of the homepages of the bigger organizations acting within the scene (such as the farmers’ organizations, and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation). Specific searches were made of the local brands of semi-natural pastures’ meat. Through these searches, texts were found originating from several different senders with varying aims and agendas. The texts selected for further analysis were related to farmers or ruminants in combination with the aforementioned words in the search. Also we included texts in the analysis where the orientation around environmental hero or villain was strong even though they were not related to semi-natural pasture. Generally speaking, these texts fit in three categories: two where the farmers are depicted either in positive or negative manner, and the third that could be described as a response to those two images.

When analyzing the texts we used critical discourse analysis (CDA), inspired by Norman Fairclough (1995). Our goal was to investigate the connection between identity and power relations on one hand, and the production and interpretation of discourse on the other. News discourse not only reflects identities but also contributes to their constitution. Therefore, media contribute to identity negotiation. To catch these processes we searched for metaphors, wordings and labels in the texts; as comparing the quotation rate of different actors can be a way to see how legitimate and trustworthy they are perceived to be (Pietikäinen, 2003). We used a development of this when analyzing who is blamed for climate change. Research on this basis has mostly been carried out with respect to ethnic minorities, but we focused on cultural/professional minorities; in our case, farmers. Media tends to present a very limited picture of minority groups (Pietikäinen, 2003). Often, these groups are portrayed as either playing a passive part which is affected by the actions of others, or playing an active role, for example, when discussing cases of crime or violence (Teo, 2000).

Journalists typically prioritize the use and application of ready-made materials as a basis for their production (Pietikäinen, 2003). This has two consequences for our case. First, since the preparation must be conducted by someone else, it is more likely that the perspective of the majority (not the minority, i.e. the farmer) is published. And, second, some of the background data of the news material is often reused or recycled; resulting in several articles in one or different sources. This can be seen in our collection of documents. Our analysis does not try to map the interdependence of different articles, but rather to analyze the data that farmers and other readers are exposed to.

Results

More than 60 texts about meat production in Sweden were analysed. When searching texts, three general categories are apparent: (a) texts in which farmers are portrayed as heroes, (b) texts in which farming/farmers are portrayed as villains, and (c) responses/commentary to the aforementioned narratives.

The hero

Within this category, the farmer is portrayed as a prerequisite for a landscape and nature that is valued and appreciated by society. This individual is a skillful professional who has unique knowledge, and delivers high quality products and values that are requested by society. This farmer acts morally towards animals, nature, the planet, and its inhabitants – on both the local and global scale. This individual is also

empathic towards the consumers since the message is (often) that “farmers deliver the healthy food that you need”.

The “hero” image of farmers, farming, and farm products differs depending on the sender of the information. Some of the texts found in this research originate from companies or organisations that are dependent on the farmers for meat production. As such, it can be interpreted that their core aim is to promote meat products, while simultaneously attempting to convince the reader that semi-natural pastures add extra value to the meat. The texts included arguments that the pastoral landscape is an important and attractive characteristic of the Swedish landscape, and that it is connected with important biological values. Additional arguments were that a) pastures are beautiful; b) pastoral aesthetic, cultural and biological values depend on grazing; c) production of the brand of meat mentioned in the text contributes to grazing; and d) the meat comes from animals that have been grazing in a beautiful landscape.

When compared to competency products, the semi-natural pasture meat is presented as both a more healthy alternative due to its greater nutritional value (e.g. omega-3s), and as a higher quality product with regard to taste. It is also highlighted that the meat is often locally produced; which, in turn, is described as positive with respect to improving animal welfare and regional employment levels, while also lessening transportation-related emissions. Several of these added values are also alluded to in the brand names. At times, products are named after the specific region or the type of nature in which they are produced: Meat from pastures by [the lake] Mälaren, Green pasture meat, “Honeysuckle meat” (meat produced in a county which has honeysuckle as its symbol), etc.

Other texts in this category stem from nature conservation organisations and authorities which are trying to either convince consumers to support semi-natural pasture production, or persuade farmers to maintain semi-natural pastures. Some quotes from this category are:

“The farmer and his animals play a key role [in saving our heritage]”; “Farmer helps species to survive”; “Meat for open landscapes”; “If we care about the summer meadows we should choose meat from cows”; “Many [people] believe the landscape is provided by nature and assume the farmer is only using it. If the farmer takes his animals away the landscape will still be there. But that is not the case”; “The farmer, an endangered key species”. These texts have in common that they present the farmer as an irreplaceable – and vulnerable – producer of biodiversity. In these texts one common message is that society is, or at least ought to be, thankful to the farmers and their contribution to biodiversity maintenance and production. In essence, through these texts the farmer is told that society is thankful to them and society is told to continue supporting the important but vulnerable farmers.

The villain

The second group of texts includes arguments that farmers, farming, or farm products are responsible for the pressing crisis of climate change. *Farmer as climate villain* is a new identity, – although farmers have also been accused of being environmental villains in general (Wilson et al., 2003). This group of texts argues that people can “save the planet” by eating less meat.

In these texts, the phrase “environmental villain” (Swe miljöbov) is frequently used. It is used without being defined or questioned by many different senders, indicating that it is well assimilated into the Swedish everyday language. In only one case was a synonymous word, “miljöskurk”, applied. It appears that “miljöbov” is the accepted word in this discourse. It is taken for granted that no one wants to be the villain garnering the blame for climate change. On the other hand, the word “bov” (villain) is not a very strong word in the Swedish language. Rather, it has a slightly comic nuance referring to old movies. The actor(s) put forward as ‘the villain’ varies between the texts and also throughout a text. In the reviewed articles, we found ‘the villain’ defined as the political structure, the meat industry, the production itself,

agriculture, methane gas, the cow, meat, beef, and the consumer. It is the choice of wording that is interesting. In several texts the cow is in focus and depicted as “a real/true environmental villain” (Swe Kon – en riktig/sann miljöbov) (Aftonbladet 21 January 2008, Aftonbladet 12 March 2008). In addition, several of the presented villains are non-intentional subjects. Within the word “villain” rests an intentionality that is mitigated when talking about meat per se. That is, by using meat as scapegoat, it is up to the reader to decide who is to blame. Quite often, the main accusation is directed towards the meat itself; but in the end it is the consumer who is encouraged to decrease meat consumption. For example, several authors talking about the detrimental effects of eating meat mention the alternative of choosing meat from semi-natural grasslands.

In these texts, meat *production* is used interchangeably with meat *industry*. This contrasts to hero texts, where the self presentations of meat producers provide as little association as possible to industry but preferably to pastoral landscapes. The word “climate conscience” (Swe klimatsamvete) can be found in the texts (e.g. “*You can eat meat from Green Pasture Meat with good climate conscience*”; Swe “*Gröna hagars kött kan man äta med gott klimatsamvete*”); implying that we all have a certain part of our conscience sacrificed for climate issues. Irrespective of whether this is true or not, the formulation implies that climate is as important a question as any and that it should not be ignored by anyone. This implies that farming activities – which are being connected to the drivers of climate change – are therefore morally questionable. Therefore, for a farmer to acknowledge climate change there is the requirement for admittance of a demoralizing identity.

Concretely speaking, the farmers are absent in the texts (but could possibly be discerned as both climate villains and nature conservation heroes). In only one single text was the farmer presented directly as the villain (Aftonbladet 22 June 2007), and, interestingly enough, that text was not about meat, but rather tomato production.

Responses to the two narratives

Currently, farmers keeping cattle on semi-natural grasslands are facing two conflicting images of themselves being presented in media. In some texts they are presented as environmentally responsible and for having taken measures to be more environmental friendly, while in others their production is presented as a serious threat towards society. These two attributions coexist in a parallel manner and are expressed differently in different media.

We have also found texts in which individual farmers or farming organisations give a defensive answer to the narrative of the meat production as a societal threat. As stated above, we found only one text that accused the farmers themselves for being villains; however, based on the observed reactions in the texts responding to the “villain” narrative, it is clear that farmers have understood the debate as critique of themselves. There are direct and indirect reactions (i.e. responses that address a specific accusation from someone or make a story where the climate is commented on). One heading used by a farmer in a debate article is: “Meat producers are not environmental villains”. Another debate article written by a farmer states “Do not call me environmental villain”.

McHenry (1996, pp 379-380) investigates standard arguments that were used to defend farmers from environmental accusations in a paper focussing on German farmers. Some of the strategies found can also be witnessed in our Swedish case regarding climate change, including: denial of the problem, stating that the problems have been partly overcome or at least dealt with, arguing that the issue at stake happens to be the “black sheep” among many white ones, or pleading other considerations (e.g. economic) to be more important. One specific text where the indirect accusations are met will be commented on more specifically below.

The chosen text is from the Swedish Farmers' Association (LRF) and published on their website. The text is found under the folder titled "climate". The mere fact that such a folder exists represents a testament of the LRF's acknowledgment of the relationship between climate change and their activities. The text is rhetorically interesting since it has a strong *logos* when it systematically responds to critique. Also, the *ethos* and *pathos* of the article are well elaborated. It starts by stating that Swedish beef meat is a good choice with respect to the environment and climate change. Added later on in the text is the condition: "in comparison to meat from other parts of the world". The text continues by bringing up the benefits of beef and milk in terms of their relative nutritional value and the positive effects that production of these products have on employment levels and the natural landscape. In several instances within the text the author emphasises the traditional – or cultural – aspects of meat production and consumption; referring to beef as "deeply rooted in the Swedish food tradition".

When commenting on the climate issue directly, the author claims that Swedish farmers are well aware of the situation. The reason for the high emissions of methane is not just portrayed as something the cows do, but also as an effect of their processing of the food. By being precise and specific it becomes more obvious that the cows do not emit the gasses due to bad manners or laziness; rather, that it merely due to anatomical reasons. This balanced formulation stands in great contrast to the rather colloquial/trivial wordings in some of the villain texts – where the cow is accused of burping and farting (Aftonbladet 21 January 2008) – and, in doing so, the LRF thereby establishes a trustworthy *ethos*. The author explains the debate about methane as a result of more people *being aware* of the risks of global warming. Formulating the argument in such a manner makes it more likely to think that the situation is not objectively worse, but rather more a matter of a man-made phenomenon which has affected the beef producers in a harmful way. The author does not argue the pros and cons for the production of beef. Instead the author proposes the idea that Swedish people prefer Swedish meat, and will probably continue to eat beef since it is good tasting (and also a matter of a tradition).

Climate-wise, there is also a description that is initiated regarding the benefits of choosing Swedish meat compared to meat from other countries. The Swedish farmers are presented as responsible and reliable people that have been aware of – and engaged with – environmental issues for a long time, while also intensifying their efforts in recent times and having opportunities to take further action. The uncertainties about the effects of beef production that could put it in a less guilty situation are presented and further research is requested. The article ends by formulating a shared ambition by the farmers and the consumers: to fight against a common enemy – global warming.

When considering other texts formulated as responses, it is clear that farmers perceive themselves as being accused as villains in the debate. This is not uniquely a Swedish phenomenon but can also be seen in the US (http://www.enn.com/top_stories/article/40911).

Discussion

We have found in the empirical material that two contrasting images of cattle producing farmers exist; the hero and the villain. There are, of course, several more images of these farmers, and such images are neither static nor everlasting, but rather change depending on the situation and context.

We can assume the individuals pursuing grazing-based livestock production on semi-natural pastures to, in some situations, define themselves as belonging to the social category "farmers"; or, perhaps, also with further specifications (e.g. "meat producing farmers" or "pasture dependent farmers"). Through this definition of self, members of the social category "farmers" take on action they expect a member would (or should) pursue. To elaborate, self-definition can be perceived to be a double-natured phenomenon which occurs via the convergence of two mutually occurring processes: i.e. the individual identifies herself with a social category based on personal observations/reflection towards her own action while also taking on the action she associates with the social category she is identifying herself

with. In addition, the individual's interpretation of herself is also dependent on other actors' interpretations and attribution of the social category she is associating herself with, as well as their willingness to accept her as a representative of the particular social category.

When interacting with (or reflecting upon) the texts presented in this study, the individual has to adapt and adjust her behaviour through constant negotiations with the given images – hero and villain – as well as her own self representation. When actors who identify themselves within the category “pasture dependent farmers” are met with narratives presenting grazing-based production as being environmentally friendly and contributing to biodiversity, we can assume some of them to identify themselves with a social category which is coherent with the narrative: i.e. a “nature conservation farmer”. When actors identify themselves with the “nature conservation farmer” identity they will also be motivated to take on actions which correspond with the social category; and, hence, it is expected that their nature conservation activities will increase. As part of this self representation process, we assume the actor would also estimate how an affiliation to this social category would affect her opportunities to be recognised as someone who is: (a) valuable and unique, (b) morally accountable, and (c) contributing to the constitution of the social category. Considering the “hero” narratives we have discussed earlier, we assume a meat producing farmer with semi-natural pastures would perceive this representation as a fair chance; as farmers are described as “unique and valuable”, morally accountable, and as constitutors of general societal values. In addition, these texts establish a perception that the more nature conservation a farmer takes on, the more she will be recognised.

When the farmer who has identified herself with nature conservation reads the narratives where meat production, including grazing based production, is seen as a contributor of climate change, she might reconsider whether the “nature conservation farmer” is an identity which will provide the expected recognition. When reading the statement in a national newspaper “the cow - a real environmental villain” (Swe Kon – en riktig miljöbov), there is a risk pertaining to potential confusion for the farmer's definition of identity. In this context, the potential opportunity of receiving recognition as a member of the social category “nature conservation farmer/grazing dependent farmer” becomes questioned. Since this disclaimer stems from the same social category which may be associated with potential recognition, it results in the identity as a contributor to nature conservation (or as an environmental “hero”) to be questioned: i.e. is it possible to affiliate oneself with the social category environmental hero while at the same time being described as an environmental villain?

When farmers are presented with a media-produced identity that they, their animals, or their products are environmental villains how can they cope with it? We have identified three main coping strategies: (1) accept and admit the description of oneself as a villain, (2) deny the description of oneself as a villain, or (3) ignore the description of oneself as a villain.

Accept the attribution of oneself as a villain

If one accepts the description of oneself as being a villain, there are several ways to interpret the identity. These interpretations have a common, underlying aspect: the attributed actor tries to create an identity for herself in which she avoids the blame of the villain attribution.

One way to get out of the villain identity is to change the behaviour which caused the villain attribution initially; thus to stop producing ruminants and/or stop being a farmer. While we do not believe that the climate villain attribution alone would motivate a farmer to cease ruminant production or stop being a farmer, this aspect, in combination with other situational factors could ultimately lead to this action. Since many farmers already find their situation to be economically weak, the work load to be huge, and for farming to be a lonely pursuit (Nordström Källström, 2008), one motivation to keep farming is the thought that society really cherishes the products and landscape associated with their work. Thus, if society expresses that the work done is unwanted, there is little incentive left to continue production.

And, as such, the farmer is thereby deprived of societal recognition as an environmentally friendly farmer, and has to identify herself with another social category in order to be recognised.

Deny the attribution of oneself as a villain

In order to deny the attribution of oneself as a villain, the farmer needs to identify the information, the source of the message, and/or the sender of the message as non-trustworthy and/or illegitimate. In doing so, the farmer denies the very foundation of the villain attribution; in this case, climate change. Here, the farmer discards the attribution of villain because the very foundation for the attribution is contested. Occasionally, the sender of the text which attributes farmers as nature conservation heroes are the same as the sender of the texts which attribute farmers as climate villains (e.g. WWF or the Swedish Association of Nature Protection). As such, this dichotomy constitutes a risk of sender delegitimation. This phenomenon results in a reduction of legitimacy with regard to both the texts which attribute farmers as villains as well as the texts which attribute farmers as nature conservation heroes; thereby making it more difficult for the farmer to be recognised as a member of the social category “nature conservation farmer”.

Ignore the villain attribution

A third way for farmers to react to the texts presenting meat production as climate villain – which can hardly be called a strategy – is to not recognise/acknowledge the texts or the message in any way. This reaction can, in turn, be divided into: (a) pure responsiveness, where the farmer has not taken notice of the fact that texts published in public media present meat production as a climate villain; or, (b) an acted responsiveness, where the farmer reads the text but does not perceive it as something affecting her. From our understanding, this (lack of) response to the texts presenting meat production as climate villain is the only action which does not affect the identity of the grazing based meat producing farmer, and, as a result, does not affect the farmers’ motivation to maintain and produce grazing-dependent biodiversity.

Conclusions

We have identified two narratives about grazing-based meat production in Sweden, which attributes the farmers, their production methods, and/or the products they produce, as either biodiversity heroes or climate villains. The attribution of the farmer as a biodiversity “hero” creates a social category which farmers can identify with. Identification with this category may increase the farmers’ motivation to take on nature conservation activities, since the identity as “nature conservation farmer” offers the opportunity for recognition. However, this social category is being questioned by narratives which categorize farmers as a climate “villain”. The effect of this attribution is evident since farmers are responding to the attribution through the production of their own texts. The consequence of an ambiguous representation of the social category “nature conservation farmer”, which stems from the attribution of farmers as climate villains, might be – but is not proved in this article – changes in social identification, and, ultimately, a reduced motivation to take on nature conservation and environmentally friendly activities.

We consider attribution of a stakeholder group, and the identities that the individuals might connect to as a consequence of this attribution, as an important point of departure to understand farmers’ motivation and behavior.

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