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HOW ARE WOMEN FARMERS “DOING” AND “UNDOING” GENDER?: AN  
EXPLORATION OF WOMEN’S GENDER PRACTICES IN FARMING

by

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B.A, University of Illinois Springfield, 2009  
M.A., Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 2012

A Dissertation  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy Degree

Department of Sociology  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
May 2021

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Sociology

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February 25, 2021

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Rebecca J. Tuxhorn, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Sociology, presented on February 25, 2021, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: HOW ARE WOMEN FARMERS “DOING” AND “UNDOING” GENDER?: AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN’S GENDER PRACTICES IN FARMING

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Christopher Wienke

The number of women farmers in the US continues to grow even at a time when the number of men farmers is decreasing. But even as women are experiencing growing representation in this historically men-dominated occupation, they are more likely to operate smaller farm operations, own less land, and earn less than men farmers. Additionally, there are barriers to accessing the full farmer identity due to their invisibility in the largely patriarchal structure of agriculture. In this dissertation, I endeavor to learn more about how women farmers navigate the gendered structure of farming, including barriers to accessing occupation-related resources and their farmer identity, and how women farmers are “doing” or “undoing” gender.

Utilizing in-depth qualitative interviews, I interviewed 32 women farmers from 11 states and the country of Italy. I find that three main gendered structural barriers were experienced by the women farmers in this study, including access to capital-related resources, learning how to farm, and the women’s perception of conventional agriculture as a masculine occupation. I contributed to the growing “doing and undoing gender” literature by showing that the women in this study were actively engaged in interactions within and outside of their occupation that both conformed to and resisted traditional gendered expectations, demonstrating that doing and undoing gender is contextual and more of a spectrum than mutually exclusive categories of either/or. I also contributed to the “doing difference” literature by including women farmers of color, whose perspectives have been absent from previous research of women farmers. Their

narratives included examples of discrimination and unequal treatment due to their race and gender, demonstrating a clear need for an intersectional analysis of women farmers. I conclude with a discussion of these implications and make policy recommendations based on knowledge gained from this research and offer suggestions for future research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great deal of gratitude to the many people who have supported and encouraged me through the long process of grad school and dissertation writing. The list is long and each of the names important. I hope my appreciation has always been evident.

I would not have been able to conduct a study of women farmers without women farmers, so I thank each and every woman farmer who took time out of their extremely hectic and busy schedules to talk with me and share their experiences. I learned so much from all of you!

My dissertation chair, Dr. Christopher Wienke, was a perfect fit for me through this process. He was patient, supportive, and responsive to my endless questions and ideas. His guidance was invaluable. I would also like to thank my committee: Dr. Jessica Crowe, Dr. William Danaher, Dr. Rachel Whaley, and Ruth Hambleton. Thank you for all your guidance and assistance when I needed it most!

I would not be where I am today, pursuing my goals and dreams, without the constant sacrifice and support of my family. Marley, my youngest daughter, has had to sacrifice the most as I missed many of her high school moments while working on my degree. Yet she has always been my biggest fan...thank you Moo! I can always count on my oldest daughter, Leslie, for her unwavering support and holding me accountable to stay focused. My boyfriend Eddie has kept me centered, pushed me along, and talked me off the ledges when necessary. My parents, Ben and Mary Alice, to whom I owe a lifetime of gratitude for always supporting me and for passing along the love of farming. Thank you to my mentor, Ellen Watkins, without whose coaxing I would not even be pursuing this degree. And to my gang of women friends who are always willing to listen, encourage me, and show me the way, thank you from the bottom of my heart!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Globally about 43% of the agricultural labor force is comprised of women (ESA Working Paper 11-02 2011). The number of women farmers in the U.S. has been steadily increasing over the past three decades. In 1978, women-operated farms represented about 5% of all farms in the U.S. (Hoppe and Korb 2013). Statistics indicate a 152% increase in women-operated farms between 1982 and 2007, a time period during which men-operated farms decreased by 10%. Currently, approximately 1.2 million U.S. farmers are women, representing 36% of the farmer population in this country. Women in the U.S. farm nearly 388 million acres of land and their economic impact totals \$147.9 billion annually (USDA 2017). Some point to this trend of growing numbers of women in agriculture as evidence that women have broken the ‘grass ceiling’ (Doering 2013), but others question whether these figures are a true sign of empowerment for all women (Wright and Annes 2016).

A closer look at the above statistics reveals more about the situated experience of women farmers. While women entering into agriculture as principal and secondary operators has increased significantly in the past 30 years, the reality is that the majority of these farms are very small. In 2017, 62% of women-operated farms had annual sales of less than \$10,000 compared to only 54% of men-operated farms in the same sales category. Additionally, only 19% percent of women-operated farms in 2017 had annual sales of \$50,000 or more compared to 26% of men-operated farms (USDA 2017). Women farmers are more likely to operate small, sustainable, and diversified farms rather than conventional monoculture farms (Ball 2014; Fremstad and Paul 2020).

Another indicator of difference is farmland owned, where we see that women owned

about 1.09 million farm acres in 2017 as compared to men's ownership of over 1.75 million acres (USDA 2017). These statistics indicate progress toward equality in farming for women but it is clear that there is still a gap between women and men's earnings and land ownership. If recent trends in farming are indicative of the future, the percentage of women farmers will continue to grow but the size of their operations may continue to be small in comparison to men's operations. Women motivated to farm have historically been blocked by farming organizations, farming communities, and within farm families from access to land, capital, and the organizational status within farming due to their collective lack of power and a sense of invisibility in their roles in agriculture attributable to the highly patriarchal organization of the occupation (Shortall 2001) and the social construction of farmers as 'male' (Leslie, Wypler, and Bell 2019).

Women's participation in the U.S. labor force increased at a rapid pace in the last five decades due to a combination of many factors, including the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, the expansion of the service sector, the decline of the male breadwinner family model, and equal opportunity in employment legislation. Women are also achieving higher education at increased rates, delaying marriage and childbirth until older ages, and having fewer children than in prior decades, all factors contributing to increased labor force participation (Toossi 2002). Women's growing involvement in farming can also be attributed to a combination of many factors within the agricultural industry, including changes in patriarchal norms that indicate women farmers are playing a more equal role in decision making and business management, and gaining more acceptance as equal partners within farming operations (Brasier et al. 2014; Peter, Bell, Jarnagin, and Bauer 2006); emerging new ideas of masculine success defined less by traditional models of power and dominance and increasingly with an emphasis on

family interaction and emotion, allowing for relaxed gendered expectations and increased dialogue between men and women (Barlett 2006; Peter et al. 2000); shifts in agriculture to more sustainable and value-added practices (Peter et al. 2000; Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Trauger 2004; Wright and Annes 2016); increased educational opportunities through collaborative group efforts (Barbercheck et al. 2009; Kiernan et al. 2012; Trauger et al. 2008), and new networking opportunities to aid in the building of social capital (Kiernan et al. 2012; Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Wright and Annes 2016). Women's increased involvement in farming and embracing the farmer identity indicates that women are increasingly experiencing personal empowerment and obtaining spaces of knowledge and authority in a traditionally male-dominated occupation (Trauger et al. 2008). But *how* do women farmers experience and make sense of their farmer identity in a work and cultural context where men are the statistical and social norm, and is there an association between their farmer identity and their gender self-perception?

One purpose of this study is to assess the ways in which women farmers “do” (or “undo”) gender in the heavily masculinized occupation of farming. West and Fenstermaker (1995) argue that gender is not a role or individual characteristic but rather a socially constructed accomplishment through interaction with others, a “mechanism whereby situated social action contributes to the reproduction of social structure” (21). By “doing” gender, women and men behave in gendered ways following normative beliefs about femininity and masculinity and enact the gender binary. These performances of gender are both an indication of and reproduction of gendered social hierarchies within the social structure (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, Deutsch (2007) argues that because the doing gender approach implies gender is a social construction, it can therefore be deconstructed, or undone, by challenging or resisting gender ideologies and norms and dismantling gender differences.

Smyth, Swendener, and Kazyak (2018) utilized the doing gender theoretical framework to study women farmers' self-perception of gender and found that farm and ranch task involvement was related to women's gender self-perception. Utilizing a survey, the researchers asked participants to rank themselves on a gender measurement scale measuring masculinity or femininity. Women more involved in farm and ranch tasks, especially tasks involving manual labor, ranked themselves higher on the scale of masculinity than women living on farms who identify as homemakers, who ranked themselves higher on the scale of femininity. The authors point out that this difference in gender self-perception could indicate that women farmers may be more willing to adopt a more masculine self-perception to fit into the male-dominated domain of agriculture, and that women (and men) who are more invested in a feminine self-perception may find farming as an occupation off-putting. This measurement was a single continuum scale and the depth of interviews exploring how women were ranking themselves is missing. For example, could women who have a more masculine self-perception be selecting farm and ranch tasks because it is considered a more masculine occupation, or were women in the study ranking themselves more masculine as compared to cultural norms of femininity or as compared to other farm women?

Pilgeram (2007) used in-depth interviews with women and men farm operators as well as participant observation to study how women in agriculture in the U.S. do and undo gender. She found that in order for women farmers to be seen as capable "they must reproduce the hegemonic masculinity that codes conventional agriculture as masculine and...the only means to success in conventional agriculture is to reproduce the *status quo*, which functions to further reify the ties between masculinity and agriculture" (Pilgeram 2007:592). Doing femininity was a disadvantage to the women farmers she studied in this male-dominated field. The scope of her

research, however, was narrow in that her sample was drawn from one livestock auction space, all of her respondents were white, and she only conducted in-depth interviews with seven participants, four women and three men. Smyth, Swendener, and Kazyak's (2018) limited sampling frame included surveys only from women in the state of Washington who were involved primarily in family wheat and cattle farming operations with at least \$1000 of farm sales annually and race of the respondents is not even mentioned as a variable. I will expand on both of these studies by conducting a more in-depth exploration of women farmers' perceptions of masculinity and femininity as well as by exploring doing and undoing gender with a more racially and geographically diverse sample of women farmers.

Another purpose of this study is to learn more about how women farmers experience the gender structure in their farming occupation, what gendered structural forces women farmers encounter in their day-to-day lived experiences in a male-dominated occupation, and how this may affect their full access to their farming occupations. It is of specific sociological interest to have a better understanding of how women's gender identities are understood and negotiated in male-dominated workplaces, and in particular to farming how women farmers use their gendered identities to achieve further empowerment and access to the 'farmer' identity. By examining these aspects from a structuralist perspective, we learn more about the persistent power imbalances that shape the structure in which they have to negotiate their gender identities in order to embrace their work identity.

A feminist standpoint perspective will guide my research process. Smith (1987) states that women's own understanding and experience in creating knowledge is important to understanding women's lives and utilizing a feminist standpoint methodology will help me to create knowledge that will be valuable to women (and men) not only in the agriculture industry

but in learning more about the power of gender in our everyday lives.

## SELF-REFLEXIVITY IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

I was raised in a farm family in the Midwest. My dad worked long days as a union electrician and then farmed nights and weekends. My mom had her own business and helped with various farm chores when time permitted. We had cows, pigs, and chickens, but the bulk of the farm was corn and soybeans. I was the youngest of four kids and had two brothers and a sister. My younger brother worked with my dad in the fields from the time he was big enough to reach the pedals of a tractor and became the heir apparent as we grew older. My tasks on the farm growing up included mowing, walking beans, painting fences, helping with meals, and other odd jobs. I never remember thinking that farming was something I could do too, like my brother. The cultural norms prohibiting my access to farming as an occupation were firmly in place. Men were farmers and women were farm helpers.

Over the years, my brother decided he did not like farming and has walked away from the family farm. My nephew is now farming with my dad, who is still working every day at the age of 82. In the meantime, I started farming part-time with my boyfriend and discovered I loved it! I love the smell of fresh dirt and working it in the spring. I feel a connection with the land. Most of the women I interviewed for my dissertation agreed that the love of farming seems to be in your blood – you either love it or you don't regardless of how you get started. But I did not reflect on why I was not allowed the opportunity to experience farming with my family in the same way my brother was until taking a gender and work class in grad school.

The research on women farmers confirmed what I had already experienced – farming in the United States is very patriarchal. A woman's typical entry into farming is through marriage as the patrilineal heritage common in agricultural families means that sons are more likely to

inherit land, and economic structures limiting women's ability to earn and borrow money creates a barrier to buying their own land (Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Shortall 2001). Cultural norms are largely attributable for the patterns of gender inequality we see in farming, including the social construct of agriculture as a masculine occupation and the oft-held belief that "only men can be farmers" (Rosenfeld 1985:245).

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this dissertation, I contribute to the literature focusing on how women navigate the gendered structure of farming, a highly masculinized occupation. I expand the research on the doing and undoing gender perspectives, as well as the microstructuralist perspective of the gender structure in agriculture. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do women farmers navigate the gender structure of farming?
  - What barriers to accessing occupational-related resources do women farmers experience and in what ways are they able to overcome these barriers?
  - To what extent do women perceive farming to be a masculine occupation and in what ways does this affect their own identities as farmers?
- How are women farmers "doing" or "undoing" gender?
  - How do women farmers construct their work identity within the stereotypically masculine domain of agriculture?
  - In what ways and to what extent are women farmers embracing masculinity due to the higher value placed on masculinity by the farming community?

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In this dissertation, I present the findings from the qualitative research that I conducted with women who identify as farmers from 11 states and the country of Italy. Data were collected

from semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted either in-person, over the phone, or via video conferencing. I interviewed a total of 32 women farmers. The interviews were conducted from October to December 2019. Interview respondents were recruited from Facebook solicitations and snowball sampling.

## OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

My outline for this dissertation is as follows. In Chapter 1, I have broadly outlined what I will examine in this dissertation and have provided my substantive research questions. Chapter 2 is a literature review discussing the relevant literature on the history of women in farming, gender and work, and the “doing” and “undoing” gender theoretical paradigm. I detail how I am applying the “doing” and “undoing” gender theoretical perspectives to women farmers. In Chapter 3, I introduce my research methods and discuss how I conducted my research. I detail the methods used, the pilot study, recruitment strategies, research sites, and analytic strategy in coding my data. In Chapter 4, I present my analysis of the data for the experiences of the women I have categorized as “Farming Experiences that are Gendered”. This chapter focuses on the gendered structural elements identified by the women farmers in this study that make access to success in their farming occupation difficult. These gendered elements included access to capital-related resources, learning how to farm, and the overall common belief that farming is a masculine occupation. In Chapter 5, I discuss my analysis of the data categorized as “Gendered Experiences in Farming”. In this chapter, I have analyzed the data utilizing the doing gender and doing difference perspectives which allowed me to see how each woman experienced gender and race in differing ways. This chapter is divided into two subcategories: the continuum of “doing” and “undoing” gender, and the intersectionality of doing difference. I conclude my dissertation in Chapter 6 with a summary of the findings, a discussion of the implications, and suggestions for



future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section provides a historical look at women's connection with farming in the U.S., tracing their roles and involvement over time. The second section examines gender and farming. In this section I discuss the cultural norms of men being farmers and women in the helping role, and the interrelatedness of the construction of masculinity in farming and women's access to farming. In the third section I discuss gender and work, focusing on the patterns and changes in sex segregation in occupations in the U.S. While occupation desegregation is occurring, it is mainly women moving into men-dominated occupations and I discuss the ramifications of that trend and how that relates to women moving into the men-dominated occupation of farming. In the fourth section I discuss the doing and undoing gender paradigm. The "doing gender" framework was introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987) and proposes that gender is a dynamic and interactive process, a product of repetitious and ritual acts occurring through constant interactions with others. The "undoing" gender framework proposed by Deutsch (2007) argued that because gender is a social construction it can also be undone. I discuss how I align my research with Risman's (2009) argument that gender can be undone and ask the question "Are we doing femininity in new ways [in farming] or being more like men because masculinity is more highly valued?" I also discuss the "doing difference" framework (Collins 1995; West and Fenstermaker 1995) that developed out of the "doing gender" perspective. The "doing difference" framework (Collins 1995; West and Fenstermaker 1995) allowed me to consider how the power relations of gender and race interact and construct difference. In the fifth section of this chapter, I discuss the implementation of the microstructural theoretical perspective and Risman's earlier work (1987) to enhance the

understanding of the relationships between gendered behavior and social change. I conclude with a summary of the literature review.

## HISTORY OF WOMEN IN FARMING IN THE U.S.

Historical trends reflect the visibility and experiences of women farmers as throughout history women have always been engaged in farming (Hoppe and Korb 2013). Native Americans were the first farmers in the continental United States, and the farmers east of the Mississippi River were mostly women. These Native American women were tasked with cleaning brush and root-grubbing, and they raised primarily corn, squash, and beans. The women were the planters, caretakers, and harvesters, and devised best practices to maintain soil health and maximize yields. They even kept watch in watch towers to guard their crops from birds. When the European settlers arrived in North America, the Native American farmers shared their knowledge with them, a cultural exchange of knowledge which was particularly important because European white men were being taught the New World's agriculture tradition from Native American women (Hurt 1994). Native Americans saw the land as a gift from the Great Spirit and much of the land was considered a community commodity, but upon entrance of the European settlers the ultimate goal of farming for the settlers became profitability and ownership of the land (Hurt 1994).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, women came from overseas to work as indentured domestic servants, but many got put to work in the fields. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, many farm women worked in the fields alongside their husbands or hired out to work for other farmers (Hurt 1994). "Although agrarian life offered prosperity and civil rights to men, it promised only hard work and continued subservience from rural women, white and Black, slave and free. Agrarianism meant that women could work in the fields alongside their men, but they would seldom own the

farm, and the land gave them no political voice or social status except through their husbands” (Hurt 1994:74). Sachs (1983) noted that where it was common for women to perform male tasks on the farm in times of labor shortage, it has never been common for men to perform tasks usually performed by women. Increasingly in the 1800s, women – wives and daughters – went to work in factories to provide money for the family farm while sons were expected to stay on the farm to provide agricultural labor (Sachs 1983).

In the early 1900s, women were called on to help with the farm work when needed but were not recognized as farmers (Flora and Flora 1988). In addition to performing farm work for their husbands, farm women in this era often had to help provide for the family by selling alternative farm products to buy groceries and other necessities (Adams 1993). In the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. Department of Agriculture led a campaign to encourage and support farm women, realizing the importance of their contributions to maintaining and keeping up family farms. Women in this period were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the isolation and drudgery of rural life as their contributions to the farm were devalued and male domination was increasingly tiring to them (Sachs 1983).

While women have always been engaged in farming, their roles on the farm became especially important in the World War II era. In the early 1940s as World War II progressed, responsibilities shifted as women were engaged to fulfill the roles of their farmer husbands to address the shortage of men in agriculture created by the war. As many men farmers went off to war, women took over the farms to keep them operational. In response, International Harvester created the “Tractorette” program to train women how to safely operate and work on farm machinery and ensure a continued supply of food (Jellison 1993). To promote the “Tractorette” program, International Harvester magazine advertisements featured photos of women on tractors

working the fields or positioned under a tractor as she fulfilled the role of a mechanic. One advertisement stated, “The girls themselves were required to bring only two things – an earnest willingness to work and a complete disregard for grease under the fingernails or oil smudges on the nose” (Wisconsin Historical Society Archives). As the men returned from war, the women were relegated back to their pre-war status of focusing on the homestead – much like the millions of women employed in factories and other positions previously occupied by men – reflecting a return to a traditional sex-based division of labor (Hartmann 1978; Jellison 1993). International Harvester then rolled out a new advertising campaign, this time with women attired in dresses promoting their beautiful, colorful new International Harvester refrigerators. No more women on tractors wearing pants, just being happy and dressed femininely, working in the kitchen.

Farm women returning to their subordinate roles as homestead keepers controlled by men and reliant on men in the post-World War II era meant a return to the hegemonic gendered norms firmly in place prior to their experiences of being the farmer in charge, a trend which continued into the 1980s. While most of their responsibilities included household tasks and taking care of the children, they also occasionally performed most farm tasks but were not typically included in management activities such as marketing or purchasing decisions (Lobao and Meyer 2001). In her study of farm women in Colorado, Pearson (1979) found that most farm women identified themselves as agriculture helpers. Past studies have found that farm women relate their identity to their decision making, roles, and task involvement on the farm (Bokemeier and Garkovich 1987; Brasier et al. 2014). As women had very little decision-making authority and their task involvement in farm operations was limited, they primarily identified as helpers or homemakers (Bokemeier and Garkovich 1987). Sachs (1996) noted that whereas men are often identified with respect to their work, women who are farmwives are defined in terms of their marital

relationship to the farm. With the increased pace of globalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s came shifting roles for farm women (Key and Roberts 2007), and along with the shifting roles came the beginning of a shift in farm women's self-identities.

## GENDER AND FARMING

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, adverse agricultural market conditions, including high input costs and low market prices, together with unfavorable environmental conditions including droughts and floods, put many family farms in economic peril (Barlett 2006). During this time of peril considered within the context of globalization, U.S. farms went through a period of consolidation resulting in fewer and larger farms, and at the same time a rising number of small farms (Beach 2013). As a result, many farmwives on small family farms were forced into part- and full-time labor off the farm to supplement family income as the farm men stayed on the farm to continue daily operations (Barlett 2006; Haney and Knowles 1987). Depending on a man's masculine ideals, this could either be seen as the wife's income being a blessing, allowing him to continue farming and keeping everything afloat, or as a sign of personal failure that he is unable to adequately provide for his family (Barlett 2006).

### *Masculinity and farming*

Barlett (2006) discussed two masculine identities prevalent in the farming community, a more traditional masculine identity that reinforces strict gendered expectations and an emerging new masculinity particularly prevalent among sustainable and alternative farmers. For example, Bill, a young farmer engaged in sustainable agricultural practices, appreciates his wife's off-farm income as it allows his efforts to be centered on the farm, and he focuses on the farm as a family partnership with shared goals. An older farmer in the same study as Bill stated that he feels he isn't doing his job adequately if his wife has to buy the groceries. Bill is an example of an

emerging new masculinity in farming communities whereas the older farmer is an example of a more traditional masculine identity (Barlett 2006). How are masculine identities related to farm women's construction of their own identities *as* farm women, and why is this important? Peter et al. (2000) asserted that a better understanding of the norms of masculinity is central in understanding the lives of *both* rural men and rural women and how intertwined their identities are with each other.

Peter et al. (2006) built on the work of Russian social theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in order to relate the differences between monologic and dialogic modes of behavior to extend to better understandings of the cultures of masculinity in a context of agroecology. Monologic masculinity is described as a very performance-based ideology that "...sets precise boundaries of manhood" (Peter et al. 2000:216), whereas dialogic masculinity is described as a "...broader understanding of what it is to be a man" (Peter et al. 2000:216). While the distinctions between monologic and dialogic masculinities do not describe all masculinity features, the authors claim that they do describe many of the differences between the masculine ideologies of farmers more inclined to industrial methods of farming and farmers more inclined to sustainable methods of farming. Farmers who have shifted from practicing industrial agriculture, which is more capital-intensive and less focused on community involvement and environmental management, to practicing sustainable agriculture, which is less capital-intensive and more focused on environmentally friendly practices and community involvement, have been found to be restructuring traditional patriarchal norms and discovering and implementing a more dialogic masculinity (Peter et al. 2006).

Monologic masculinity, associated with farmers engaged in industrial methods of farming, is characterized by performativity of roles that clearly distinguish the differences

between men's and women's work and a limited scope of topics allowed to be discussed. For example, these farmers will not discuss failures and only to some degree successes with their wives and other men. Monologic masculinity norms include denial of aesthetic comforts for oneself and others: these men do not eat while they are working as it is not manly to stop working hard and indulge in the personal comfort of food. Dialogic masculinity norms are more communal centered and concerned with the needs of themselves *and* others (Peter et al. 2000). Peter et al.'s (2006) analysis of sustainable agriculture farmers suggests that their more dialogic masculinity emphasizes an openness to change and to communicate through networking, resulting in more open conversations between men and women, which in turn allows for women to be heard. Men more willing to be open to sharing their experiences, both successes and failures, aids women in learning more about farming operations as a whole, further contributing to their ability to access spaces of knowledge (Peter et al. 2006).

### *Sustainable agriculture*

In addition to Peter et al.'s (2000; 2006) findings, Trauger (2004) noted that "...women find support for their identity as farmers in the spaces of the sustainable agriculture community" (304) in other ways as well, including their attraction to and belief in the superiority of sustainable practices. Sustainable agriculture is a type of farming that incorporates the wellbeing of farmworkers, animals, and the environment into a profitable business model. The methods used in sustainable farming are designed to minimize water usage, improve soil health, and reduce levels of pollution associated with conventional and industrial methods of farming. The main idea, thus the name "sustainable agriculture", is that the methods used do not degrade natural resources needed for future generations of farmers (Amadeo 2019). Sustainable farming practices have been attributed to many women's entry into farming.



Pilgeram and Amos (2015) found that women have realized additional benefits to sustainable practices, including the increased likelihood of self-identifying as a farmer and the local networking opportunities associated with sustainable agriculture (i.e. farmers' markets) being conduits for building social capital and networking with other area farmers, particularly women farmers. Additionally, for women with a desire to farm but not much capital to get started, sustainable practices offer a more affordable entry into land access and overall operation costs (Pilgeram and Amos 2015). Based on 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture data, women are more likely to be principal operators on sustainable farms than conventional farms (Fremstad and Paul 2020). These structural processes that are occurring are intertwined. Wright and Annes (2016) point to sustainable agriculture as opening opportunities that allow women to challenge hegemonic conventional farming systems. Sustainable agriculture is giving women a headway into agriculture by way of more affordable entry, increased self-identification, and increased social networking opportunities, while at the same time the practices associated with sustainable farming are contributing to the shifting masculinities within agriculture which also benefits women. Entry into this domain, however, could also be indicative of the limited opportunities that women face when pursuing a farming occupation. Because small-acreage farms are best suited for sustainable agricultural production, women are more likely channeled into sustainable operations due to their inability to afford larger, costlier, perhaps more industrial – and likely more profitable – operations. Considering this reality, we see the distinction between ideological reasons for engaging in sustainable agriculture and economic reasons, which serve to constrain and limit accessibility and independence (Pilgeram and Amos 2015).

Value-added agriculture is another practice found to be a conduit for women into farm operations. “Value-added agriculture entails changing a raw agricultural product into something

new through packaging, processing, cooling, drying, extracting or any other type of process that differentiates the product from the original raw commodity” (Matthewson 2007:10). Wright and Annes (2016) explored the empowerment of women through value-added agriculture practices as a way for women to diversify and explore new markets. The authors define empowerment as a “dynamic, ongoing process” (Wright and Annes 2016:551) that is constructed by individuals within their conditions. They found that women engaged in value-added agriculture, including community-supported-agriculture (CSA) farms and farm tourism, experienced higher visibility and representation in and greater connection with the community. Through the process of connecting with and becoming embedded within the broader community, women engaged in value-added agriculture businesses were able to build greater social capital. For example, Grace, a study participant, indicated that she was “not interested in raising corn and soybeans like these farmers around here. I am a people person, I need to talk to people” (Wright and Annes 2016:559). Social isolation is a concern for farm women (Keirnan et al. 2012) and value-added agriculture provides rural farm women with the opportunities to establish social ties to overcome isolation, and these social ties also allow women to demonstrate and share their knowledge with others which further builds feelings of empowerment and their social capital (Wright and Annes 2016).

Land, labor, and capital – referred to by Sachs et al. (2016) as the agricultural trifecta – are requisite for farming. Land ownership has been the primary source of power and status since our nation became a nation and settlers began staking their claims to farm and provide a living (Hurt 1994). The status and prestige accompanying land ownership translates to increased access to additional resources including labor, capital, and political power, and is also important in shaping one’s identity (Shortall 1999). Entry into farming is dependent on access to land, and

women's access has long been constrained by economic and social barriers built into the social structure. Women were not legally able to own land in the U.S. until after 1850, and after that lingering legal policies hindered women's ability to buy farmland, including federal tax laws that, until they were changed in 1982, taxed women on land inherited from husbands but not husbands inheriting land from wives (Jensen 1991). Social norms also historically barred women access due to the patrilineal heritage common in agricultural families of passing on land to sons, not daughters, which means that women rarely inherit land and, due to economic structures limiting women's ability to earn and borrow money, face difficulties in being able to own land (Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Shortall 2001). Familial heterosexism can also eliminate the option of inheriting farmland, as Leslie (2017) found that family heterosexist norms barred queer farmers' access to land inheritance due to their non-hetero sexuality.

### *Education and farming*

Due to the patriarchal structure of farming in the U.S. in which sons typically inherit the farm, sons also learn how to farm by growing up farming and being taught by their fathers (Sachs 1983). Most women farmers do not experience this benefit and have voiced the desire for educational opportunities to improve their agricultural skills to be more successful in their occupation (Barbercheck et al. 2009; Trauger et al. 2008), a need that has become increasingly relevant as the number of women farm operators is increasing (Kiernan et al. 2012). Charatsari et al. (2013) argued that agricultural education is key in increasing women's visibility in the occupation and in reducing gender inequalities.

A good deal of research has focused on the role of Extension education in educating women farmers. Extension programming, widely available in rural areas, was created in 1914 to teach farmers how to increase production and farm more efficiently (Seevers 1997), but over

time became focused on capital-intensive technologies more suited to larger scale farmers and thus inaccessible and less relevant for small-scale and specialty crop farmers (Buttel and Busch 1988). Trauger et al. (2010) found that Extension educators “tend to view legitimate farming operations as large-scale, commercial and commodity-oriented systems and tend to see legitimate farmers as men who do the mechanical work of production” (98) and, as a result, a significant amount of the education offered by Extension is targeted toward men farmers and large-scale farms. Women farmers addressed concerns with existing educational opportunities, including Extension programs, as being geared toward men, toward larger farm operations, unwelcoming and hostile toward women, and not focused on the general characteristics of women’s farms (i.e. smaller acreage, diverse crops and livestock, organic and sustainable practices, and marketing strategies relevant for all of these characteristics). Women also report that existing educational opportunities do not value their input or take them seriously (Charatsari et al. 2013).

Two responses to the concerns voiced by women farmers have been the creation of educational opportunities partnered through Extension but focused on women: Women’s Agricultural Networks (WAgN) and Annie’s Project. WAgNs were created in several eastern states, including Pennsylvania, Maine, and Vermont, by groups of women farmers, Extension educators, and researchers interested in issues relevant to women farmers (Kiernan et al. 2012). Annie’s Project was developed in 2002 by Ruth Hambleton, at the time an Extension Farm Business and Marketing Specialist with the University of Illinois, and Annie’s Project classes have been offered now in 33 states (Schultz et al. 2017).

Women seeking relevant farm education voiced the need for hands-on education, not canned PowerPoint presentations utilizing a one-way discourse of knowledge, a shortfall of the

limited traditional Extension education being offered prior to the establishment of WAgNs (Trauger et al. 2008). New educational goals were set, developed around the concept of social learning and peer-to-peer interaction. Among the educational opportunities offered are topics such as beekeeping, direct marketing, cheese making, fencing, soil quality, and tractor maintenance, all with an emphasis on participant interaction. Besides women learning valuable skills, the WAgN operators found that the more the women participated, the more they wanted to continue participating and assisting in the education of other women, an added benefit of which was the building of social capital. While the focus of these Extension educational events are women, men also attend and, over a period of four years, men's attendance rose from attending 43% of the events to attending 75% of the events, allowing women and men the opportunity for networking and knowledge-sharing that would likely not otherwise have occurred (Kiernan et al. 2012). Women farmers have voiced frustration that men farmers do not want to share information (Trauger 2004) and these events foster the ability to break down the gendered barriers between women and men farmers (Kiernan et al. 2012).

Annie's Project is a unique educational program for women farmers in that it has been developed with an emphasis on including women farmers' voices in establishing the program agenda, and its focus on promoting gender equality in agriculture including the encouragement of attendees to ask questions, share their experiences, and network with other participations (Schultz et al. 2017). The hands-on courses are designed to be offered over a six-week time period with 18 total hours of class time focusing on five agriculture risk areas: financial, legal, human resources, marketing, and production (Devlin 2017). Research shows that Annie's Project is successful in improving the knowledge of participants in all of the five risk management areas focused on in the classes (Schultz et al. 2017), as well as in increasing women farmers'

confidence in financial management activities (Groskopf 2020) and empowering them to find their voice and agency (Devlin 2017).

Increased education includes benefits that go far beyond the direct benefit of learning a specific skill. As previously discussed, networking was a benefit for women and men farmers engaged in WAgN educational opportunities where men farmers networked with women farmers and could share their lifetime of acquired knowledge and skills with the women (Kiernan et al. 2012). Education also allows the acquisition of social and cultural capital, which is beneficial in a number of ways. Reay (2004) discussed the benefits of education for middle-class parents, noting that middle-class mothers had more options relating to empowerment and confidence than their working-class counterparts. Mothers who had acquired social and cultural capital through their educational success displayed more self-assurance and the ability to argue opposing perspectives. This allowed them to use their social space with more confidence, whereas the mothers who did not have a college education displayed a lack of confidence. A sense of entitlement, another operation of cultural capital, was also noted with the middle-class mothers.

Lareau (2002) also noted class differences in being assertive, finding that middle-class parents with a college education were much more likely to be assertive in their social world as compared to parents without a college education, and they were also more likely to transfer that confidence and even entitlement to accommodations in their social spaces to their children. Overall, Lareau (2002), like Reay (2004), concluded that middle-class parents with a college education had acquired more cultural and social capital than working-class parents without, affording them more confidence and entitlement in their interactions with others. Educational opportunities available to women farmers could not only increase their practical knowledge needed to be successful in their farm operations, but they could also benefit from increased levels

of social and cultural capital which results in higher levels of confidence, assertiveness, and self-assurance. These traits are extremely beneficial in establishing their identities and competence in an occupation that traditionally sees men as the experts.

### *Entry into farming*

Because social and economic factors construct a very limited access structure for women who desire to operate their own farms (Pilgeram and Amos 2015), a woman's typical entry into farming in the U.S. is through marriage (Shortall 2001). This entry method is a tenuous relationship for women as a divorce usually means the end of the relationship with the farm regardless of their desire to continue in agriculture. Economic structures, such as women's earnings in the work force being stagnant since the mid-1990s, limit the available capital women have to contribute to buying farms.

In a recent article published by CBS News (Picchi 2015) titled "11 jobs where women face the biggest pay gap" citing 2013 U.S. Census Bureau data, women farmers and ranchers are listed as the occupational category with *the biggest pay gap* out of all the professions measured by the Census. According to this data, women farmers earn 60.7 cents for every dollar earned by men farmers. Fremstad and Paul's (2020) analysis of 2012 Census of Agriculture data supports this finding as well. They found that women-operated farms earned 40% less than men-operated farms after controlling for operator and farm characteristics and concluded that the gender inequity in agriculture has not been eliminated by the growing number of women farmers. It is not that women are less proficient farmers than men, but rather the size of farming operations (Picchi 2015) and the type of farming operations (Fremstad and Paul 2020) both contribute to the gap in earnings. Sachs (2018) noted that women's access to conventional agricultural farming is complicated by state policies "that often explicitly support patriarchal family farms through

extension programs, government loans, and marketing policies” (12). Therefore, if women don’t marry in, many women desiring to start their own farming operation have to rely on a partners’ (spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend) earnings to buy land and sustain their farms’ operating costs (Pilgeram and Amos 2015), especially given that a high percentage of women-operated farms are in the sales category of less than \$10,000 annually (Hoppe and Korb 2013). This dependence on a partners’ earnings severely impacts true independence for women, as well as contributes to the tenuousness of this relationship as much as marrying ‘into’ farming does. If women are forced to depend on a partner’s earnings to keep their farm afloat, keeping the farm in the absence of the partner (through separation, divorce, or death) is endangered and many times impossible (Pilgeram and Amos 2015).

### *Identity formation*

Cultural norms are largely attributable for the patterns of gender inequality we see in farming. The inheritance practices of land in which heirs are male are influenced by cultural ideals (Shortall, McKee, and Sutherland 2020). The social construct of agriculture as a masculine occupation and the oft-held belief that “only men can be farmers” (Rosenfeld 1985: 245) is a cultural norm. Women in an occupation in which the cultural norms value men as more competent can make women feel excluded (Davies 1996). How do we produce social change allowing women greater access to farming and identities as capable farmers given the knowledge that much of the gender hierarchy in farming is due to cultural norms? Ridgeway (2006) situated gender inequality within the organization of social relations and the process of sex categorization. Ridgeway applied this perspective to any interactions in which gender is salient, and we can extend that to the farm and to the sex categorization of men as capable farmers and women as not as capable to address the stereotypes that sex categorization evokes. Ridgeway



(2011) argued that to disrupt the stereotypes and assumptions and rules that accompany them, as well as the hierarchy they reinforce, we need to disrupt the process of automatic sex categorization through a process of changing our cultural beliefs.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, the expectations of how we are supposed to act and connect with others in society are reflected in our individual identities (Stryker 1980). Traditionally, when farms and farm work are being defined and situated in a social context, women are frequently unrecognized and ignored the identity as farmers (Shortall 2001) because men are associated with the label and identity of 'farmer' (Peter et al. 2000; Sachs 1996). Farming is considered to be a masculine occupation requiring physical strength and technological abilities attributed to the norms of masculinity (Saugeres 2002a). Barbercheck et al. (2009) found that many farm women also struggle with the social acceptability of women claiming the 'farmer' identity, reporting that they do not get the respect from others like men do.

Because of the assignment of space to men in the norm of masculinity in agriculture and the non-recognition of women, Pini (2005) and Shortall (2006) found that farm women will enact various strategies while performing masculine tasks to emphasize their femininity, and others have found that women are more likely to identify themselves as farm helpers or in a supportive role rather than as farmers (Peter et al. 2000; Sachs 1996; Sachs 1983) which denies them from claiming spaces of knowledge and authority (Trauger 2004). Interestingly, Sachs (1983) found that unmarried farm women were much more likely than married farm women to identify and label themselves as farmers, a likely product of the patriarchal norms adhered to on family farms. Rosenfeld (1985) suggested that research on women farmers should focus on family power relationships due to the power differential between husbands and wives and the affect this differential has on women farmers' identities and decision-making processes. Peter et

al. (2000) maintain that the “category of ‘farmer’ remains the exclusive domain of men’s work, not only in the eyes of the community but within the family as well” (224).

While farming is considered to be a masculine occupation (Saugeres 2002a), it is important to keep in mind that what it means to be a man and therefore the valued way of doing masculinity is fluid and differs depending on place and context. For example, a man’s ability, mastery of skills cutting tobacco, and doing hard physical labor is the valued way of doing masculinity for tobacco farmers (Ferrell 2012), whereas the ability to acquire new powerful machinery is the valued way of doing masculinity for commercial farmers (Peter et al. 2000). Pilgeram (2007) claimed that conventional agriculture’s ideal type of masculinity includes the strength to wield control over the weather, the toughness to handle livestock, and the independence to do everything they need to do without ever asking for help.

#### *Race of women farmers*

As previously stated, women are experiencing a growth in numbers in farming, but the growth has not been experienced equally by all women. 3.2% of women-operated farms in 1978 were operated by Black women, but by 1997 that percentage had decreased to just 1% whereas the same time period saw an increase in farms operated by white, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islander women, with the largest increase in numbers of women farm operators being white women (Korb 2004). While data shows that sustainable farming has opened up the occupation for women, Pilgeram (2019) noted that this increased access is most available for white, well-educated, heterosexual, married women. Data explaining the drop in Black women farmers in comparison to others is missing. One viewpoint to consider as noted by Penniman (2018), an activist Black woman farmer and entrepreneur, is that the agricultural industry landscape is white-dominated and most of the images of farmers and stewards of the land that we

see are of white people. Missing from our view is the history of Black people and their immeasurable contributions to agriculture in this country which serves to limit the ability of Blacks to envision farming as a viable occupational option and as a connection to the land.

Sachs (1983) noted that the labor of white women and Black women in agriculture is different, and “in order to comprehend women’s work in agriculture, this racial distinction must be explored” (24), yet most of the literature examining women farmers to date has focused exclusively on white women farmers. Even reports put out by USDA fail to fully recognize differences in racial characteristics of farmers. Hoppe and Korb’s (2013) “Characteristics of Women Farm Operators and Their Farms” published by the USDA, presents many demographics of women farmers in the U.S. but fails to distinguish racial categories, a blatant example of the invisibility of racial group distinctions.

An intersectional approach in my own research will require that I attempt to the degree possible to incorporate various intersecting identities for women farmers, including women of color, of varying sexual identities, of different socioeconomic statuses and levels of education, and varying geographical locations, to consider cultural norms that could impact women farmers’ identities and access to their chosen careers. Utilizing an intersectional paradigm will allow me to examine the variability and flexibility of interactive processes occurring within and amongst the various institutions and individuals impacting women farmers as well as social practices that shape their daily experiences (Few-Demo 2014).

## GENDER AND WORK

It is important to understand the changing economic and labor landscape changes in the U.S. in relation to the patterns within agriculture, particularly when considering the changes in sex-segregated occupations. The United States saw a major economic transformation in the 20<sup>th</sup>

century from an agricultural and industrial goods-producing economy to a service-producing and white-collar economy, a transformation that created changes in the sex segregation and the sex composition of jobs. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, occupational sex segregation was strongly instituted, and some occupations began to experience a sex resegregation of workers as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed (Bose 2001). There was an overrepresentation of men in craft occupations, the best paid of the blue-collar workforces, and managerial occupations, the best paid of the white-color workforces, and an overrepresentation of women in administrative-support and service occupations, as well as the lower-paid professions of social work, teaching, nursing, and library work (Reskin and Roos 1990). One of the main reasons for this job resegregation was a shortage of male workers (Bose 2001). Other reasons included the reorganization of some jobs, creating more tasks that required fewer skills, and the falling wages for these types of positions. Gender ideologies that characterized women as suited for boring, menial tasks that did not require independence or leadership qualities coupled with employers' desire for a cheaper workforce were both contributing to the feminization of these occupations (Reskin and Roos 1990).

Some of the most sex-segregated occupations in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century included the “masculine” occupations of engineers, auto mechanics, and airplane pilots, and the “feminine” occupations of secretaries, domestic workers, nurses, and kindergarten and preschool teachers (Williams 1989). While the sex segregation of jobs is one of the most long-term characteristics of the U.S. labor market (Reskin and Hartmann 1986) and the majority of occupations in the U.S. are sex-segregated, there has been some evidence in the last several decades that desegregation in occupations is occurring (Bianchi and Rytina 1986; Reskin 1993). But even in occupations that appear to be sex-integrated, internal stratification is common and is

characterized by men and women performing different tasks and functions within those occupations and job categories. For example, in some hospitals male nurses are not allowed to have an assignment as an obstetric and gynecological nurse, and women bakers are most often found in baking industries that are highly automated compared to male bakers working in less-automated bakeries. Williams (1989) argued that occupational segregation “reinforces the belief that there are fundamental social and psychological differences between the sexes” (5).

When desegregation does occur, it is most often due to women moving into men-dominated occupations rather than men into women-dominated occupations (Williams 1993). Women report higher wages (Lillydahl 1986) and higher levels of prestige (Bose 1985) as incentives for entering men-dominated occupations. Men report a decline in status and pay as reasons for not entering women-dominated occupations (Williams 1989). Crossing over into a non-traditional occupation can be problematic for men and women as often those who cross over and work as the “wrong” sex in highly sex-segregated occupations are considered feminine men and masculine women. “Especially in modern industrial societies, what we do for a living not only determines what we earn; in addition, it defines us in other people’s eyes, “placing” us in relation to other people in ways that affect our friendship networks, our selection of appropriate marital partners, and even our self-esteem and physical well-being” (Vallas, Finlay, and Wharton 2009:5). Our work roles affect the way others perceive our characteristics and what we are – and are not – capable of. Studies of men and women working in non-traditional occupations illuminate these perceptions.

Williams’ (1992) oft-cited study of men in four women-dominated professions focused on three main topics: barriers to men’s entry into these professions; support from supervisors, colleagues, and clients; and reactions from the public outside the profession. The study showed

that whereas women get treated paternalistically or derogatorily when working in men-dominated occupations, men in women-dominated occupations have greater levels of bonding with the other men that they work with, or with their professors while in school, both of which result in better job opportunities and career advancements. Some other advantages noted in the study were that men get “kicked upstairs” into administration positions but, on the flip side, are punished for not aiming high enough if they prefer to stay at a lower level within the organization. It was noted that men experience a hiring preference in these occupations with a few exceptions: the refusal to hire men for K-3 teaching positions in one school district identified in the research, and the refusal to hire male ob/gyn nurses in private Catholic hospitals.

The men in Williams’ (1992) study noted that some of the negatives associated with their positions included lesser pay than comparable “male” occupations as well as discrimination from outsiders, particularly the negative stereotypes questioning their sexuality and masculinity for working in women-dominated occupations. Comparing women’s and men’s experiences in nontraditional occupations, Williams (1992) noted that while women in nontraditional occupations face discrimination and prejudice within the profession, men in “female professions” experience discrimination and prejudice from outside those occupations. The men’s experiences within the occupations are fair and even preferential when it comes to hiring and promotion preferences, acceptance by peers and supervisors, and integration into the subculture of their workplaces, all mechanisms that work to move men up in authority and power and out of the most women-identified areas of these workplaces, a phenomenon which Williams (1992) terms the “glass escalator effect”.

Wingfield (2009) asserted that Williams’ (1992) study, the sample for which was 90% white, supposed a “racial homogenization of men workers” (Wingfield 2009:6) and conducted a

study of Black male nurses to examine if the glass escalator effect was also available to minority men as it is to white men. Women and men tokens, which Wingfield (2009) described as the extreme numerical minority in a given position, have different lived experiences in their token positions. Women experience disadvantage due to their high visibility, which hinders their ability to perform their work duties productively. At the same time they are highly visible, they are also isolated in the sense that they are overlooked and ignored. High visibility for men tokens results in increased opportunities for leadership positions and better job assignments, another example of gender privilege.

As noted in Williams' (1992) study and reiterated by Wingfield (2009), occupations traditionally held by women have low pay and prestige but pay and prestige tends to increase as more men enter these occupations. Men also experience a warmer welcome when entering a women-dominated workplace than women entering men-dominated workplaces. Men are more likely to have same-sex supervisors as men are more likely to be promoted up to levels of supervision in women-dominated occupations than are women, and men also build strong relationships with colleagues, unlike women in men-dominated occupations who continue to remain isolated. Wingfield's (2009) goal was to find out if these advantages were race-specific, and the results of her study indicated that Black men experience 'glass barriers' to riding the glass escalator. Rather than moving up into positions of authority with support from their peers and supervisors that the white men in Williams' (1992) study experienced, the Black men in Wingfield's (2009) study encountered multiple barriers to similar advancement, demonstrating that race and gender intersect making white men much more likely to ride the glass escalator.

Wingfield (2009) specifically noted that Black men did not receive a warm reception from women colleagues like white men received. Rather, they received cold treatment and

isolation. Additionally, Black men did not receive preferential promotion treatment, and their attempts at upward mobility were restrained by their colleagues and supervisors. Also, patients treated Black nurses differently than white male or female nurses, and reproduced stereotypes were noted that Black men were more suited to be menial laborers, not nurses. This was particularly evident with white women patients. Another negative Wingfield (2009) noted was that sexuality, and the characterization of Black men as hyper-masculine, could be a factor with Black men establishing rapport with white male supervisors.

In her study of tradeswomen working in a highly masculinized occupation, Dennisen (2010) found that tradeswomen employed various strategies of being reflexive and strategic to suppress the salience of gender. For example, one tradeswoman shared that she would not let the men take over her job, a stereotypically female behavior, but would not overemphasize masculinity because she did not want to show men up, and thereby situated herself as a gender-neutral worker. The tradeswomen manipulated gender rules by emphasizing the identities that would be more advantageous for them in a given situation and did not choose to act either stereotypically feminine or masculine. Dennisen (2010) emphasized that previous literature has failed to appreciate the agency women can leverage in situations where they are in an occupational double bind in which they feel they must choose between a masculine or a feminine identity.

Yoder and Aniakudo (1997) studied Black women firefighters to examine issues of subordination, difference, and the intertwining of race and gender in the male-dominated occupation of firefighting. “Marginalized others offer a unique perspective on the events occurring within a setting because they perceive activities from the vantages of both nearness (being within) and detachment (being outsiders)” (Yoder and Aniakudo 1997:325-6). The



researchers found overall that Black women firefighters experience negatively differential treatment in comparison to Black or white men firefighters, or white women firefighters. The Black women firefighters in this study experienced subordination through exclusion, received insufficient instruction, the hostility and silence of their coworkers, increased supervision compared to their peers, and an overall experience of being treated more harshly for any mistakes they made. They suffered denigrating stereotypes, being referred to as welfare recipients and beasts of burden. Several study participants reported staying to themselves, a self-imposed isolation utilized as a coping mechanism to deal with the differential treatment they received, noting that they were damned if they did and damned if they didn't. The Black women noted that relations within the department were particularly strained with white men, and whereas some Black men were helpful, many times they had bonded with their white male counterparts and the Black women firefighters became the "outsider" against whom all the others rallied against.

#### DOING AND UNDOING GENDER

Farming is also a sex-segregated occupation dominated by men, and as I seek to better understand women's experiences as farmers within this nontraditional occupation, I utilize the "doing (and undoing) gender" paradigm which provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding how women farmers experience and make sense of their identities as farmers. It is useful to my research that other researchers have also utilized the doing gender framework to analyze the experiences of women in nontraditional occupations.

West and Zimmerman (1987) caused a great shift in how we think about and theorize gender in sociology when they published their article "Doing Gender". They introduced a new perspective on understanding gender as an accomplishment achieved through interaction, of

gender as an adverb instead of a noun, and argued that the *meaning* of gender is not being created through interaction but gender *itself* is being created through interaction and because it is being created through interaction it is considered natural. The focus of their argument is how we as humans have created differences between the two (and only two) sexes that are not “natural, essential, or biological” (West and Zimmerman 1987:137), but because of these created differences we are always “doing gender” in all our social interactions.

Workplaces are gendered spaces in which employees are accountable to gender norms and those who do not adhere to the norms often are ostracized, harassed, or lose the possibility for career advancement (Miller 1997; Rhode 1997; Talbot 2002; Valian 1999). Research studying career women working in male-dominated occupations find that these women are often forced to pick between an image of professionalism or an image of femininity in order to deal with the conflict between appropriate gender norms for women and the norms of the occupation they have chosen, resulting in a struggle between their career and their gender identity (Hoschschild 1973; Riordan, Gross, and Maloney 1994). Kelan (2010) contended that the very presence of women in non-traditional occupations (those occupations where the workers are primarily men) casts gender norms in doubt and is thus a form of “undoing gender” by “broadening the notions of what it means to be a woman...and by creating more meanings associated with gender” (187-188).

Applying the doing gender framework to women police officers, Rabe-Hemp (2009) interviewed forty female officers to examine their identification with their gender and police roles and the perception of themselves as masculine or feminine, studying how they do gender and work simultaneously. Rabe-Hemp (2009) found that the women officers did gender in socially appropriate ways by adopting the feminine expectations of being the caretaker,

empathetic and soft, while vigorously resisting the more masculine expectations of being aggressive and violent. In doing so, the policewomen are reifying feminine stereotypes and possibly, according to Rabe-Hemp (2009), finding new ways to do gender in tandem with police work.

Schilt and Connell's (2007) study of transsexual/transgender people at work employed the doing gender framework to learn more about how their study participants navigated same-gender and cross-gender interaction in the context of the workplace after their open gender transitions. Coworker anxieties about how to do gender appropriately with their transitioning colleagues reinforced the gender binary by reproducing a hierarchy of gender disadvantaging women. They found that transmen moved up in the gender hierarchy and were welcomed by their heterosexual male colleagues into their all-male interactions, whereas transwomen were viewed by their coworkers as giving up their male privilege. Overall, Schilt and Connell (2007) stress that while gender crossing does have the potential to create social change by challenging gender norms and requirements of doing gender, what they found was that the context of the workplace limited the ability to impactfully challenge binary views on gender and gender inequality. In a later study, Connell (2010) argued that as transpeople in her study negotiated the misalignment between sex, gender, and sex category, they were engaging in "doing transgender" and faced more workplace discrimination than others who were not gender nonconforming.

In opposition to West and Zimmerman's (1987) doing gender perspective, Deutsch (2007) argued that we must change the questions we are asking to focus less on how we change the way gender is done and focus instead on how it can be undone. Whereas doing gender is a perspective focused on how gender differences are reproduced, an undoing gender perspective, would focus on interactions that reduce and dismantle gender differences (Deutsch 2007).

Deutsch (2007) argued that the focus should be on how we can create equality between women and men by dismantling the gender system. Risman (2009) agreed with Deutsch (2007) and that instead of continuing to support the binary system of doing gender, we need to start looking at ways to undo gender. Risman (2009) proposed that in order to continue moving forward to a society devoid of the gender binary we need to move past sex categories and therefore our existing gender norms.

McDonald (2013) studied how male and female nursing students do and undo gender and found multiple ways through which they engaged in doing and undoing gender. McDonald (2013) found that the men and women in his study were held accountable to the dominant norms of femininity in order to be seen as “good nurses”, norms including nurturance, compassion, empathy, sympathy, and kindness. The male nursing students also reported downplaying masculine norms such as aggressiveness and competitiveness to adopt more feminine-coded traits such as being mild-mannered and gentle. Overall, the women nursing students were doing gender by enacting the conventional norms of femininity while the men nursing students were undoing gender by resisting culturally constructed masculine behaviors in favor of more feminine-coded behaviors. By performing these behaviors, the students believed they would be characterized by others as good nurses.

Risman’s (2009) ideas of undoing gender support a main question I will be asking in this study: Are we doing femininity in new ways – are we finding new ways to be women – or being more like men because masculinity is more highly valued in our society? Whereas Bokemeier and Garkovich (1987) and Sachs (1983) found that women with their own farm operations were reluctant to identify themselves as farmers due to the connection of the farmer identity with men and masculinity, Smyth, Swendener, and Kazyak (2018) found in their study of women farmers

that those more involved with tasks on their farm or ranch reported a more masculine gender self-perception and farmer identity. They concluded that the women in their study who viewed themselves as primarily farmers or ranchers were more likely to perceive themselves as masculine than women who identified primarily as homemakers fulfilling farm-related tasks. Furthermore, they noted that their research and related literature indicates that women within the farming industry are adapting and changing their self-perceptions and identities to be more aligned with the hegemonic masculinity inherent in agriculture. This seems to support the idea that these women are “undoing” gender, or undoing their femininity to instead perform masculinity.

What is missing from the Smyth et al. (2018) research that I addressed in my study relates to my previous question – are women farmers adapting their own self-perceptions to embrace masculinity because that is more highly valued in society, particularly in an agricultural society, and do they believe that their accomplishments and achievements are not important *unless* they are associated somehow with men or masculinity? My study also expands Smyth et al.’s (2018) contribution to the literature to include the experiences of Black women farmers and farmers from various geographical locations because, as Wingfield (2009) noted in her critique of Williams’ (1992) study, I cannot assume a homogenous experience for all women farmers and allowing more voices to be heard contributes more depth and understanding to the lived experiences of women working in the nontraditional occupation of farming.

Using the “undoing gender” paradigm for her research, Pilgeram (2007) noted the existing dichotomy for women involved in farming: women are either feminine or they are tough. Some women farmers struggle with the desire to maintain femininity while at the same time exhibiting masculinity to fit into the farming industry. As noted previously, women who

cross over and work in a highly sex-segregated occupation where men are dominant are often considered masculine women (Williams 1989). When women farmers appear feminine, their abilities as farmers are questioned. When women farmers appear masculine, their abilities as women are questioned. To be seen as capable, women farmers must “reproduce the hegemonic masculinity that codes conventional agriculture as masculine” (Pilgeram 2007:592). Therefore, women must “undo gender” to dial down their femininity and reproduce the masculinity that is necessary to fit in and be perceived by others in the farming community as capable of being a farmer.

One way in which women farmers reproduce masculinity is through their appearance. Women may choose to dress in a way that masculinizes them and discards the markers of femininity. For example, wearing plaid shirts, old jeans, and work boots is a way many women farmers display masculinity. They may also avoid carrying a purse as well as avoid feminine-colored clothing. For some women this process of undoing and doing gender can cause internal conflict and can feel defeminizing (Pilgeram 2007). However, Leslie (2017) found that many of the queer women farmers in his study embraced the opportunity to be self-expressive and able to dress gender-neutral as it strengthened their individual agency, some noting that gender-neutral dress contributed to their motivation to try farming. Building on the previous literature, this study explored ways in which women do and undo gender and explored how the relationship between masculinity and agriculture is experienced by each woman.

### *Doing Difference*

In an effort to include race and class in their earlier framework of “doing gender”, West and Fenstermaker (1995) proposed another interactional perspective they termed “doing difference”. Admitting they had neglected to include race and class in their previous framework,

they criticized using additive approaches to understand oppression and advocated for an intersectional approach to understand how these systems of inequality function together and simultaneously as interactional processes. They further argued that race and class is missing in feminist thought due to its white middle-class bias and a restructured perspective of difference – considering race, class, and gender together – is necessary to move feminist theory forward.

Winant (1995) applauded the political applicability of West and Fenstermaker's (1995) doing difference perspective but believed it to be limited in its approach and application. Winant's (1995) view is that social structures should be thought of as "dynamic and reciprocal" (504), not static and merely a product of a repeated, one-sided process. Therefore, Winant (1995) argued, difference is not something that is done but rather something that individuals are. Collins (1995) added to Winant's (1995) critique of West and Fenstermaker's (1995) perspective by noting that they promoted gender as the most fundamental category in their theoretical argument with race and class as additives while completely ignoring the problems and power relations of racism, class exploitation, and gender oppression. I have aligned this study with Collins and Birge's (2016) argument that an intersectional approach is an analytical tool that emphasizes the power constructs in society and is used to understand the complexities of identities. A key emphasis of intersectionality is on being critical in social justice processes while embracing the synergy of ideas and actions. In this way, I can extend the doing/undoing gender approach to also consider the ways in which women farmers may also be "doing difference" by ensuring an intersectional approach in my analysis.

#### MICROSTRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE

A social structural theoretical perspective considers that women's and men's gendered behaviors are a result of the unequal and different positions they are assigned to in the social

structure. These assignments then constrain their behavior into stereotypically female or male behavior and restricts them from stepping outside of their assigned positions even if they feel inspired to do so (Bem 1993). The first application of structuralism was from Kanter in her book *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977). Kanter's (1977) research focused on the imbalanced sex and race ratios in workplaces and provided evidence that gender inequality was not because of women's and men's differential behavior due to internalized femininity or masculinity but rather to an individual's place in social networks and the unequal opportunity, power, and tokenism in organizational structures. Kanter (1977) used the term "tokenism" to refer to an underrepresented group in the workplace that visibly stand out against the background of the dominant group. The dominant group is uncertain how to treat the "tokens", which can result in the token group being isolated from formal and informal communication networks. As a result, these uncertainties may result in the dominant group expecting stereotypical behavior from the token group and rewarding only sex-role appropriate behaviors performed by the tokens. This is one way in which the social structure can constrain and shape behaviors.

Risman (1987) expanded on Kanter's (1977) structural perspective and argued that gendered behavior is created and shaped via immediate social settings, and that women's and men's differences in behavior "arise from differential experiences, opportunities, and access to social networks" (Risman 1987:9), therefore everyday interactions at the micro level are the source of gender differences in behavior. Risman (1987) posited that our gender status affects our behavior not because we have internalized masculinity or femininity as stable personality traits and have been socialized how to perform them, but because of our experiences with and interaction within our social structures. Further, even when in similar positions within the social structure, men and women face different experiences based on gender status and our behavior is



adaptive to ongoing social interaction.

Risman (1987) tested her theory by examining single fathers who had been involuntarily thrust into the role of being the primary caregiver for their young children after being widowed or deserted by their partner. The men had not been socialized into the situations they were facing – they had not internalized mothering roles and behaviors. She argued that her theory would be supported if men mother and nurture their children much like women in the same situation do because microstructural factors would be more influential than individualist factors in shaping the gendered behavior of mothering. Men had not been socialized into being mothers, so therefore the nurturing behavior exhibited would be a result of microstructural factors – how they learn mothering behaviors through interactions in their structural environment. Her findings supported her hypothesis that microstructural factors have a significant impact on gendered behaviors. An important issue raised with Risman’s (1987) research is that if we are going to effect change in the social structure to eliminate gendered expectations of behavior, we have to implement changes in the social environment. It is not enough to change or train individuals: we must implement policies and societal expectations for change. “Only when situational contexts change, will parenting behavior among men become more similar to the parenting behavior of women” (Risman 1987:28).

In later work from Risman (2004) still focused on gender as a social structure, she argued that if women cannot see the barriers in the social structure and continue to see themselves as differently situated than men, the social structure is not experienced as oppressive and “therein lies the power of gender” (Risman 2004:432). Shortall, McKee, and Sutherland (2020) noted that, although we have seen change within agriculture to be more accepting of women in the occupation, the rate of change remains slow and gendered inequalities are still deeply entrenched

due to the structural barriers still in place that favor men.

Shisler and Sbicca (2019) utilized a structural approach in their study of women farmers in Colorado. Much like my study, they were also interested in learning more about how women farmers handle their roles in the masculinely structured world of agriculture. They interviewed 16 women farmers in Colorado who were mostly (69%) engaged in sustainable or organic agricultural practices. Their sample, like most other research samples of women farmers, consisted entirely of white women. They found that some of the women in their sample experienced marginalization in their occupation as farmers much like women in other male-dominated occupations and shared occurrences of tokenism, harassment, and difficulties in their work-life balance. Rather than adopting a more masculine identity, however, the overall finding was that the women farmers in this study “expand what it means to be a farmer by performing femininity through carework within their farming practice” (Shisler and Sbicca 2019:875) rather than performing masculinity to fit into the world of agriculture. Shisler and Sbicca (2019) argue that this finding suggests these women were finding new ways to be women in a highly masculinized occupation instead of being more like men. However, I would argue that women farmers and farm women have always been assigned the feminine duties of carework and nurturing (Beach 2013) and therefore they are performing the feminine behaviors that they have learned are culturally expected in a masculine-coded occupation.

Deutsch (2007) asserted that in order to understand change, we must “theorize and research the relations between the structural and interactional levels” (117). Risman (1987) discussed that individualist paradigms, popular at the time of her research, presumed that internalized traits were the result of socialization and responsible for gendered behavior.

Microstructural paradigms employed by, for example, Kanter (1977) in her groundbreaking work

on female labor force participation, instead asserts that behavior is “adaptive to ongoing interaction” (Risman 1987:9), not a fixed product of early socialization and biology.

Important to my research within Risman’s (1987) study is her contribution of applying a microstructuralist perspective to better understand the relationship between feminist social change and gendered behavior. It is well documented in the literature that when farms and farm work are being defined and situated in a social context, the category of farmer is gendered male and because of this categorization farming is specifically marked when referring to women – men are farmers and women are women farmers (Peter et al. 2000; Trauger 2004). Much like mothering is a gendered behavior associated with women (Risman 1987), farming is a gendered behavior associated with men. Whereas men are assumed to have a natural ability to farm, women, and women’s bodies, are “seen to be lacking in masculine attributes which are defined as central to farming” (Saugeres 2002b:641).

My research incorporated a microstructural paradigm that considered situational and structural factors that could be influential in the production of occupational behaviors of women farmers. For example, women engaged in farming are often defined in terms of their relationship to their husband or other male family members involved on the farm, not as farmers themselves. Their expected gendered behavior is that of a helper, supporter, or caregiver, not a farmer (Beach 2013). Cultural narratives continue to influence men’s and women’s ideas about who can legitimately claim the identity of a farmer (Carter 2017). “We might expect women farmers to construct a farm role different from men (in order to be recognized as women), and different from ‘traditional’ farm women in order to be recognized as farmers. They have to combine elements of tradition with new ways of being a (woman) farmer” (Haugen 1998:137). Women farmers still have primary responsibility within the structure of the family for housework

(Haugen and Brandth 1994) and childcare (Beurteaux 2018) while men farmers have someone else – a wife or mother – to perform these tasks (Haugen and Brandth 1994), meaning that women farmers have to perform a much larger range of conflicting tasks than do men farmers to be recognized as both farmers and women within their farming communities (Haugen and Brandth 1994). Queer women farmers (Leslie 2017) and women farmers of color (Hinson and Robinson 2008) have even more obstacles to navigate in the agriculture occupational landscape than white heterosexual women farmers which requires different tactics for becoming a farmer and identifying as a farmer, as well as creating and maintaining relationships with others in the farming community.

Risman (2018) argued it is best to adopt an integrative theoretical understanding of gender. Rather than thinking about the power of social structural forces and cultural narratives versus the power of socialization in considering how our gendered selves are created - so thinking in terms of either/or - it is best to adopt the “both/and” strategy suggested by Collins (1998), a strategy in which multiple processes are considered as to how oppression is internalized and becomes a part of our self and shapes how we interact with the structure. As such, a microstructural framework was only a part of my overall research design.

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I contribute to the discussion of women’s gendered experiences in the masculine occupation of farming which also informs the overall work on women in traditionally male occupations. I reviewed the history of women’s involvement and traditional roles in agriculture in the U.S. Traditionally, even though women have worked right alongside men farming doing much the same work, they have been thought of by others in the farming community and even themselves as a helper or nurturer, not a farmer. Reviewing the literature

focused on gender and farming, I discussed the multiple barriers to claiming the farmer identity that women farmers experience. These barriers include patriarchal and cultural norms; monologic masculinity; and barriers to accessing land, labor, and capital. The gender and work literature discussed adds to our understanding of the sex desegregation and sex integration of occupations. Men tend to experience more personal and career advantages than do women when entering opposite-sex occupations, but Wingfield (2009) argued that this does not apply to Black men the way that it does to white men. Finally, my analysis is situated in the doing and undoing gender and microstructural frameworks, and the literature reviewed discussed multiple ways in which different researchers have applied these paradigms in their research with various findings. The remainder of this dissertation will focus on my research methods, a discussion of the major findings, and a conclusion including a discussion of suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

In this dissertation, I will assess the ways in which women farmers do or undo gender while living their day-to-day lives as farmers. To assess how women farmers navigate gendered experiences as women in a male-dominated occupation, I analyze interview data collected from interviews with women identifying as farmers. I chose to conduct qualitative interviews for my research as qualitative data provides rich data full of nuance and context and the goal of qualitative research is to gain a better understanding of certain social situations, groups, events, or interactions from the perspective of the research participants (Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman 2014).

The methodology employed in my research is based in feminist standpoint epistemology, which is rooted in the idea that individuals are the experts of their own experiences (Ravitch and Carl 2019). Standpoint epistemology is defined as an approach to research that emphasizes the connection between feminist knowledge and women's experiences, and "developed from feminist criticisms regarding women's absence from, or marginalized position in, social science" (Maynard 2004:1073). Standpoint epistemologies recognize that women and men lead very different lives resulting in very different kinds of knowledge and that, historically, research was largely conducted from and focused on male interests and perspectives. Adopting a standpoint perspective allows the researcher to gain valuable insights into gendered power and relationships (Maynard 2004). Feminist epistemologies originate from the work of Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins and emphasize the experience of those being researched above the expertise of the researcher. Following this approach, I designed my research guide to include somewhat open-ended questions which allowed various themes to emerge. Interviewing and analyzing data

through this epistemological lens was important to me because I wanted to learn more about how women farmers define their gendered cultural practices and gain a deeper insight into women farmers' perception of their selves, their identities, their lives, and their work, particularly due to their overshadowed existence in the male-dominated occupation of farming. Reinharz (1992) states:

Interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women (19).

In this chapter I will first discuss the pilot project I completed leading up to my dissertation project and the influence that had on several research decisions for my dissertation. I will then discuss my research sample including how participants were recruited and where I conducted interviews. Next, I will discuss the coding process that was employed for this study. I will conclude this chapter with an overview of the themes that evolved from the data that will be discussed in further chapters.

## THE PILOT STUDY

To explore women in farming further and to help clarify how I wanted to proceed with my dissertation project, I conducted a pilot study as an assignment in a research methods course in the spring of 2018. I interviewed 4 women farmers, completed 6 hours of participant observation, and attended a seminar hosted by local agriculture industries and government agencies for farmland-owning women and women farmers. Completing this study allowed me to build on existing literature in developing research questions and to have experiences in farm

settings as a researcher instead of a farmer and an “insider”, which I will expand on later in this paper.

The most valuable insight I gained through my pilot project that influenced a main decision in my dissertation project was that the term “farmer” and the concept of a farm can be understood in a multitude of ways based on one’s frame of reference and understanding. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a farm is defined as “Any place that produced and sold, or normally would have produced and sold, at least \$1,000 of agricultural products during a given year” (Hoppe and MacDonald 2013:2). The definition of farmer from the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “a person who cultivates land or crops or raises animals (as livestock or fish)”. My pilot project participants defined a farmer in very different ways from these “official” definitions, which may suggest that as a result of their lived experiences and unique perspectives, women are redefining what it means to be a farmer. For example, one pilot project participant defined a farmer as someone who owns ground and is involved in day-to-day activities of farming. Another participant related the definition of farmer to the size of the operation and time put into farming. This participant felt that a garden-size or part-time farmer is not a “true” farmer. A third participant commented that a farmer is someone who is actively engaged in growing good healthy food to sell, and someone who is a good steward of the land.

As I am focusing on women farmers for this study utilizing a qualitative approach that allows them to reflect on their own experiences and identities as farmers, I made the decision to allow the participants in my dissertation study to construct their own definition of what it means to be a farmer. The main requirement for women participating in this study was that they identified themselves as a farmer. I did not put limitations or qualifications on size or type of farming operation or length of time farming. I then also analyzed their perceptions and



definitions of what it means to be a farmer as a part of my overall project. That analysis is included in Chapter 4 of this paper.

Completing this project has been a continual process of learning more about my study participants while also engaging in self-reflection to better understand how their experiences are unique to them but at the same time describing the larger picture of farming in the U.S. and how women in general, myself included, fit into that picture.

#### THE RECRUITMENT AND INTERVIEW PROCESS

Previous research informing my dissertation was focused on women farmers in specific geographical locations, including Colorado (Shisler and Sbicca 2019), Iowa (Carter 2017), Oregon (Pilgeram 2007), Pennsylvania (Trauger 2004), Washington (Smyth, Swendener, and Kazyak 2018), and even Norway (Haugen 1998). While it would have been almost effortless to recruit my sample from my immediate geographical area of central Illinois utilizing personal contacts in my own farming community, I wanted to hear the voices and experiences of women farmers from across the United States. Although women farmers share the category of “farmer”, I cannot assume a homogenous experience for all women farmers. As my pilot study found, women may define “farmer” in different ways. A diverse sample helps to explore diversity in farmer definitions. Allowing more voices to be heard contributes more nuance and depth to the analysis of lived experiences of women working in the nontraditional occupation of farming. I therefore decided to recruit participants utilizing Facebook as a recruitment platform, recognizing its reach and diversity of users in several women in agriculture groups.

After obtaining SIUC Human Subjects Committee approval for this dissertation and for the Facebook recruitment script (see Appendix A for SIUC HSC-approved Facebook recruitment script), I posted an invitation to participate in my dissertation research on two Facebook group

pages as well as on my own Facebook page. *Women in Agriculture* is a closed group on Facebook with nearly 80,000 members and *Women Who Farm* is an open group with an undisclosed number of followers. Anyone can follow the open groups on Facebook, including *Women Who Farm*, but to be a member on a closed group, such as the *Women in Agriculture* closed group, you have to request admission and answer a series of questions that explore your connection to the group. The admittance questions for the *Women in Agriculture* group limits the members to mostly women who are active in farming. I followed these two Facebook groups for over a year prior to posting my interview solicitation and noted the high activity on each with many posts daily from women engaged in farming. As a direct result of the Facebook solicitations, I recruited 17 participants for interviews. Many of these initial contacts then referred other women farmers for interviews which resulted in 15 additional chain-referral (snowball sampling) participants for a total research sample of 32 women who were over the age of 18 and identify as a farmer. After conducting interviews with these 32 participants, I determined I had reached the point of saturation in my interviews.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant either in person, via phone call, or FaceTime. At the time of initial contact with each participant I determined which method of contact would be most feasible given their physical location, availability for an interview, and my ability to travel. I conducted 21 interviews in person in 4 states (Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and Oklahoma), 9 interviews on the phone, and 2 interviews via FaceTime. Prior to each interview, whether in person or electronically, participants were provided an Informed Consent to review and sign (see Appendix B for the Informed Consent form) and an Information Sheet to complete that captured demographic information (see Appendix C for the Information Sheet). Participants being interviewed via phone or FaceTime completed their forms and returned them

to me via email either before or immediately following their interview.

I utilized a semi-structured interview guide to ask all participants the same pre-determined questions, but a semi-structured guide also allowed me the freedom to seek clarification and explore spontaneously arising issues (see Appendix D for the Interview Guide). A semi-structured interview guide also allows for a conversational tone between the interviewer and interviewee (Doody and Noonan 2013). I divided the semi-structured interview guide into four sections. I began by asking participants about their history in farming and their perceptions about what it means to be a farmer. The first section of questions also gathered information about their farming operation and how they learned what they need to know to be a farmer. I felt it was important for my interviewees to share their experiences and expertise first as farmers, and then as women in a male-dominated industry. The second section of the interview guide focused in on their gendered experiences in everyday interactions. All of the women were excited to share the details of their farm operation with me, but some became more tentative when discussing issues of gender. By allowing each participant to tell her story the way she experienced it, I was able to follow up with informational questions while probing for gendered nuance to obtain important data. The third section of interview questions focused on issues related to the responsibilities of motherhood, if applicable. The fourth section explored issues the interviewees could share about race-specific barriers, challenges, or privileges they had experienced as a farmer. I closed each interview by asking what the interviewee felt was important for me to know about women farmers, again encouraging them to share their expert knowledge.

All interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews lasted between 29 minutes and 2 hours. The average interview length was 60 minutes. Pseudonyms are used for the individual participants to maintain confidentiality in the research.

### *Role of the researcher*

The key instrument in qualitative research is the researcher herself (Ravitch and Carl 2016). I have a life-long history in agriculture having grown up in a farming family and I currently farm part-time with my partner. Given that my study population is women farmers and that I have a life-long connection with farming, I can be considered an 'insider' for this research. Being an insider researcher means that a researcher is conducting research with a population they are a member of (Kanuha 2000). Being an insider can offer many advantages. It can be useful in gaining access to and acceptance by the population I am studying which can lead to greater depth in the data gathered (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). The insider researcher may also have a unique position in understanding the experiences of the group being studied, allowing a better understanding of their cultural background (Kerstetter 2012). Being an insider can also foster an intimacy with your research population which can stimulate the discussion (Bonner and Tolhurst 2012).

As an insider, however, I do have to be diligent about acknowledging my values and biases so that others can better interpret my work. I also must acknowledge that my perspective allows me to conduct research "with" rather than "on" the group I am studying, a perspective in sharp contrast to an 'outsider' researcher (Glynn 2014). I had to avoid built-in assumptions I have due to my insider knowledge as I created the semi-structured interview questions. Question construction can guide the data collected, and I had to be careful not to allow these built-in assumptions override the perspectives and viewpoints of my study subjects (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). It is also important for me as an insider researcher to always acknowledge that while my research participants and I may have shared experiences and beliefs due to our common cultural experience in farming communities, women farmers are not a homogenous

group and differences are to be expected (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Additionally, being an insider researcher could potentially bring bias to the study and continual reflectivity was necessary to diminish unconscious bias (Creswell 2014).

## THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

My initial goal was to include as many women of color as possible for this study as existing literature focusing on women farmers predominantly includes only white women farmers. I was hopeful that using social media as a recruitment tool would result in a wider variety of racial variation among my sample. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, about 2% of all women farm producers in the U.S. are American Indian, less than 1% are Black, Asian, or Native Hawaiian, and about 95% are white (Korb 2004). I was unable to recruit any participants from any racial categories other than Black or white. I recruited and interviewed 5 Black women farmers and 27 white women farmers for this research (see Table 3.1). While it was not the representation of women of color I had hoped for, I was unable to reach more women of color for inclusion in my study and Black women's representation in this sample (16%) is greater than their representation in the total number of women farmers in the U.S. The youngest participant in this study was 24 years of age and the oldest was 76. The median age of my study participants is 46, which is 11 years younger than the average age of women farmers in the U.S. Women farmers in the U.S. on average are older than men farmers (Hoppe and Korb 2013). The average age of the principal farm operator, male or female, in 2017 was 58.6 years of age, and over 36% of farm operators are age 65 or over (USDA 2017).

Twenty-three participants in this study are mothers.

Table 3.1 Sample Description.

Sample Description	Total	%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	27	84%
Black	5	16%
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	1	3%
30-39	10	31%
40-49	9	28%
50-59	5	16%
60-69	2	6%
70+	5	16%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single never married	8	25%
Married	20	63%
Divorced	3	9%
In a life partnership	1	3%
<b>Education level</b>		
High School	4	13%
Some college	11	34%
Bachelors	4	13%
Masters	10	31%
PhD or MD	3	9%
<b>U.S. state or country of residence</b>		
Alabama	1	3%
Arizona	1	3%
Colorado	1	3%
Delaware	1	3%
Indiana	1	3%
Illinois	16	50%
Iowa	1	3%
Italy	1	3%
Missouri	2	6%
Nebraska	1	3%
New York	1	3%
Oklahoma	5	16%
<b>Total Sample Size</b>	<b>32</b>	

A high number of participants in this study were college educated, over half with a bachelor's degree or higher (see Figure 3.1). Women farmers in the U.S. on average are better educated than men farmers. Overall, fewer than 6% of women farmers but 10% of men farmers

nationwide have less than a high school diploma. Over 61% of women farmers compared to 47.1% of men farmers reported some college beyond high school in 2007. Of the 61% of women farmers reporting some college beyond high school, nearly 32% had a college degree compared to only 22.8% of men farmers (Hoppe and Korb 2013). Comparatively, none of the women in this study had less than a high school diploma, nearly 88% reported some college beyond high school, and 53% had a bachelor's degree or higher.

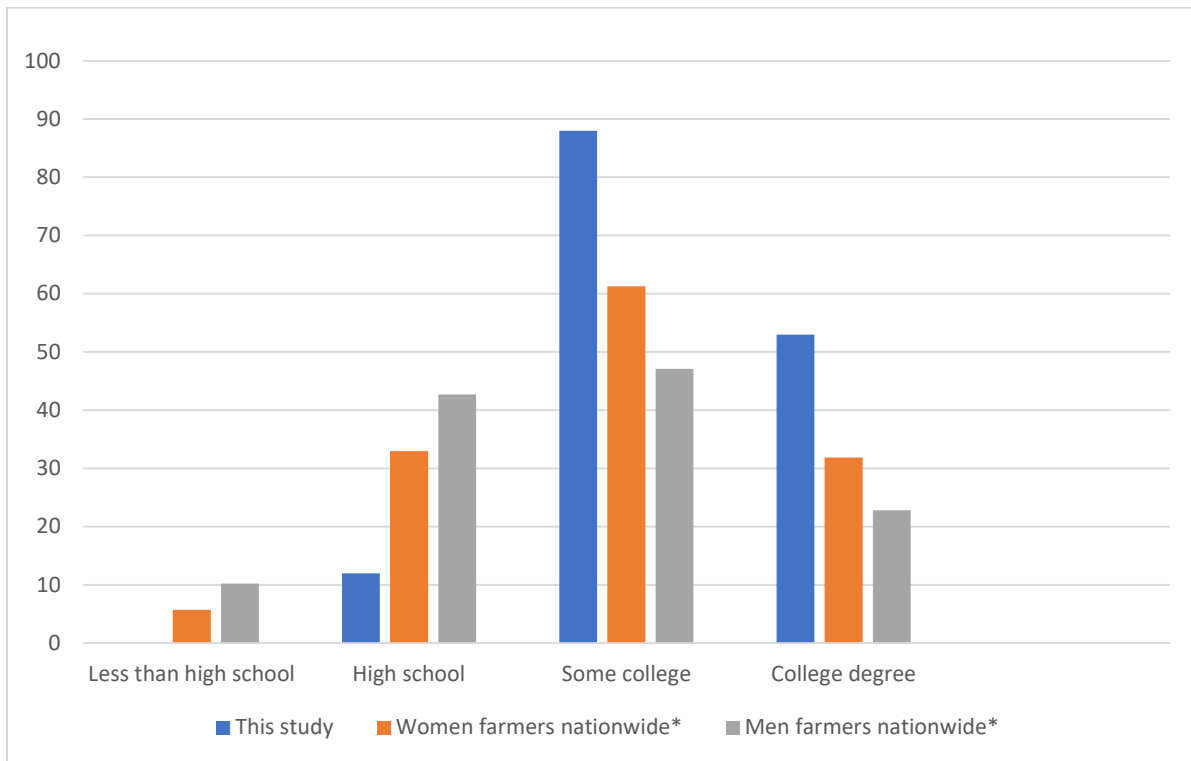


Figure 3.1 Highest Level of Educational Attainment

(\*Source: Hoppe and Korb 2013)

Nineteen of the participants in this study were married to an opposite-sex spouse, one participant was married to a same-sex spouse, 8 women were single and never married, 3 were divorced, and one reported being in a lifetime partnership. I cannot compare marital status data to nationwide statistics as these data do not exist. The USDA collects survey data and produces a Census of Agriculture report every 5 years reporting on a variety of farm and farm operator

characteristics, but data regarding marital status is not captured. Other entities, including the American Farm Bureau, Statista Research Department, and Interagency Council on Agricultural and Rural Statistics (ICARS), also conduct surveys collecting data on U.S. farm characteristics and farm operator characteristics but also do not capture marital status data. It is unclear whether my sample, the majority of whom are married women, represents the larger population of women farmers.

The majority of participants that indicated their income level on the Information Sheet fell in the \$40-80,000 household income category. Four participants reported being in the \$10-40,000 household income category, 10 participants indicated a total household income between \$40-80,000, 6 indicated between \$80-120,000, 3 were in the \$120-140,000 household income category, 1 indicated a level between \$140-160,000, and 1 over \$250,000. Seven participants failed to indicate their level of income. The median household income among all farm households nationwide in 2018 was \$72,481 (Burns and MacDonald 2018). Twenty participants reported off-farm income, including such occupations as pastry chef, fitness coach, pharmacist, school counselor, registered nurse, real estate broker, and government employment. Most farm households nationwide earn some income from off-farm employment (Burns and MacDonald 2018). A geographical variety of interviewees was attained by interviewing women from 11 states and the country of Italy.

## ANALYSIS

I employed a process of hand coding to analyze the data in my research. While actively conducting interviews, I began analyzing the data already collected to begin making notes of common themes. Upon completion of all interviews, the recorded interviews were transcribed and then printed for analysis. Through the analysis phase I engaged in a process of systematic



steps. While reading through all interviews, I engaged in a process of open coding during which I generated categories of information (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Open coding was followed by axial coding in which I began separating the emergent themes into the categories developed through open coding. Focusing in on the themes developed through axial coding allowed me to expound on specific stories as they interconnected with the categories through a process of selective coding (Creswell 2014). Utilizing this process allowed two main categories to emerge: farming experiences that are gendered, and gendered experiences in farming. Multiple emergent themes were then linked within these categories. Utilizing the “doing gender” (West and Fenstermaker 1995) perspective helped me to categorize the experiences of women farmers in the “gendered experiences in farming” category while the microstructural paradigm modeled by Risman (1987 and 2004) assisted in my categorization of experiences of women farmers in the “farming experiences that are gendered” category.

Within the category “Farming Experiences that are Gendered”, the themes that emerged were: access to capital-related resources, learning how to farm, and the perception that agriculture is a masculine occupation. Within the category “Gendered Experiences in Farming”, common themes emerged, and I separated the narratives into two sub-categories: the continuum of “doing” and “undoing” gender, and doing difference. I was able to construct separate categories by engaging with the data and recognizing that, while the women farmers in this study had differing variations of experiences, many of their experiences held important commonalities. The experiences within the category “Farming Experiences that are Gendered” include common stories shared by the women that described situational and structural experiences that influenced the production of occupational behaviors of these women. The experiences within the category “Gendered Experiences in Farming” include common narratives shared that exhibit the processes

of doing and undoing gender, as well as the intersectional analysis of gender, race, and sexual identity, within their occupations and everyday lives.

## SUMMARY

In this dissertation, I analyze qualitative interviews to examine how women farmers navigate the gendered structure of farming, and how they understand and do or undo gender in their everyday lived experiences as farmers within a highly masculinized occupation. The data consists of 32 in-depth interviews conducted either in-person or via electronic (phone or FaceTime) conversation with women who identify as farmers. In this chapter I discussed the Pilot Project that preceded this dissertation research and helped inform an important qualifier for inclusion in this research, which was “what it means to be a farmer.” I discussed the recruitment and interview process, my role as an insider researcher, the research sample, and the methods I used in coding the data. In the next chapter I discuss the findings that comprise the first category of data, “Farming Experiences that are Gendered”.

## CHAPTER 4

### FARMING EXPERIENCES THAT ARE GENDERED

This chapter will focus on the findings that I have categorized as “Farming experiences that are gendered”. These are the common experiences the women shared that emerged from the data as experiences in their farming occupation that are embedded in the gendered structure of agriculture, both at a micro- and meso-level. First, I discuss access to capital-related resources and the barriers experienced by many of the women that could and/or have restricted the size and type of operations they farm. Next, I discuss how the women farmers in this study learned how to farm. Sachs (1983) notes that most men who farm were taught by their fathers and other family members how to farm, whereas women typically learn to farm in other ways. I will share the experiences of these women, the majority of whom learned how to farm in ways other than being taught by their father or family members. Then, I will discuss how the women in this study responded to the question “Do you agree or disagree that conventional agriculture is a masculine occupation, and why?” Their reactions demonstrate their perceptions that conventional agriculture is indeed a masculine occupation. I will conclude with a discussion and my analysis of the data.

#### ACCESS TO CAPITAL-RELATED RESOURCES

As previously stated, my goal was to hear the voices and experiences of women farmers from across the United States. As a result of expanding my search via Facebook groups, I was able to interview women from 11 states and the country of Italy, representing a wide variety of farm operations (see Table 4.1). The length of time farming varied from 2 years to 70+ years. Ten participants shared they have been farming their whole life, having been born into a farm family and continuing to farm in one aspect or another since reaching adulthood. Several

participants discussed farming their own operation for a set number of years but experiencing farming as interns on other farms prior to owning their own.

Table 4.1 Farm Characteristics

Farmer*	State	Yrs. farming	Type of farm operation	Current farm entry method
Eloise	IL	12	Row crops & livestock	Married in
Linda	IL	15	Livestock	Self/bought own farm
Danielle	IL	6	Cattle & vegetables	Family (farms w/parents)
Katherine	OK	34	Cattle	Married in
Olivia	IL	54	Row crops	Married in
Helen	IL	6	Livestock	Began w/husband
Sammie	IL	11	Mushrooms	Began w/husband
Paula	NE	All her life	Corn and cattle	Married in
Michaela	IN	8	Row crops	Married in
Nancy	IL	All her life	Not own operation	Farms for others
Jeanette	MO	9+	Organic vegetables	Began w/wife
Virginia	IL	All her life	Livestock	Inherited land
Mary	IL	All her life	Livestock	Inherited land
Brenda	OK	16	Organic vegetables	Began w/life partner
Cynthia	AZ	45	Alfalfa	Married in
Kelly	MO	18	Vegetables	Began w/husband
Amy	OK	All her life	Vegetables	Self/Began own urban farm
Diane	Italy	25+	Cashmere sheep	Self/bought own farm
Terisa	OK	5	Livestock	Began w/husband
Renee	NY	2+	Not own operation	Farms for others
Alice	AL	6+	Livestock	Began w/husband
Kelsie	IA	All her life	Cattle	Family (farms w/parents)
Meaghan	OK	All her life	Cattle	Began w/husband
Pamela	DE	28	Livestock	Self/buying own farm
Maria	IL	All her life	Row crops	Family (farms w/dad)
Deborah	CO	17	Cattle	Started w/husband
Martina	IL	10+	Row crops	Married in
Lakeesha	IL	8	Alpacas	Began w/husband
Brooke	IL	15	Fruits, veggies, nuts	Inherited from mother
Chrissy	IL	All her life	Row crops	Began by self (rents land)
Karen	IL	All her life	Grain farm	Began w/husband
Mona	IL	All her life	Cash grain & cattle	Farms with family

\*All names are pseudonyms

Land, labor, and capital – referred to by Sachs et al. (2016) as the agricultural trifecta – are requisite for farming. Entry into farming is dependent on access to land, and women’s access

has long been constrained by economic and social barriers built into the social structure (Jensen 1991). Social norms also historically barred women access due to the patrilineal heritage common in agricultural families of passing on land to sons, not daughters, which means that women rarely inherit land and, due to economic structures limiting women's ability to earn and borrow money, rarely own land (Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Shortall 2001). Entrance into their current farming operations varied among this sample, from marrying into farming to buying a farm with a spouse or life partner to buying a farm on their own. Two participants did not own their operation but instead were employed by other farmers.

The typical entry into farming for women in the U.S. is through marriage (Shortall 2001), and 7 of the participants in this study began farming after marrying a farmer. Six participants are currently farming with parents or other family members. Previous research has found that more women in farming purchase land than inherit it (Duffy and Johanns 2014). In this sample, three participants bought land (or are in the process of buying land) themselves for their farm operation while one participant inherited her family's farm operation. Several are utilizing land belonging to their parents but are not owners of the land.

Consistent with research stating that women's entry into farming is often dependent on having the financial support of a spouse or partner (Pilgeram and Amos 2015), 12 participants began farming with a life partner or spouse not previously engaged in farming. These women did not "marry in" to farming but rather began a farming operation with the financial assistance of their spouse or life partner, sometimes with the participant and her spouse or partner farming too and sometimes not. Most reported that they continue to need their partner's financial support to sustain their farming business. For example, Jeanette, who farms an organic vegetable farm and does not have outside employment herself, has depended on her wife's income to start and

sustain the farm for 9 years. She commented, “It is much harder for me to go to a bank to get a loan to do what I want to do compared to, let’s say, somebody that wanted to start a restaurant because what I am doing is so unknown to the financial world.” She added that organic vegetable farms are financially very high risk and that at her bank she is the only customer that has an organic vegetable operation. Jeanette hopes the farm will be making a profit in the next 3 to 5 years. In the meantime, she relies on her wife’s income to keep farming.

Interviewer: Do you rely on your wife’s income to help the operation?

Jeanette: Oh yes, absolutely. Yeah. It took me about realistically six years of farming for me to reach a point where the farm could cover a majority of the farm’s expenses, but I still do not write myself a paycheck every month and there absolutely are times of the year where the income coming is a lot less than other times of the year and it, especially at those times, the farm would be in trouble if I didn’t have [wife]’s income to help make payroll and just generally keep the farm going...there’s no way, I mean absolutely no way, that I could do what I do up to this point if I didn’t have [wife]’s income.

Because Jeanette was unable to access lending through conventional lending sources in the beginning, she also borrowed \$50,000 from her aunt for a building construction project on the farm. She remarked that while she understands a type of operation like hers is a somewhat risky investment, it is very discouraging that banks and the USDA are not willing to take the risk. She commented that “statistics in the last five years show that there are very few young people that are getting into big commercial agriculture but there are many more getting into the type of farming that I am doing whether it is produce or eggs, making cheese...all the value-added stuff. It just made me stop and think, I was like ‘wow, you guys are really out of touch.’”

All of the women who were in this category of farming with a spouse or life partner

reported some form of outside income supporting the farm operation. Helen has an at-home day care business, her husband has off-farm employment, and together they have rental properties. Kelly and her husband used his savings and land from Kelly's family to get started in and sustain their farm. Alice's husband's income supports her farm. Alice has access to some of her dad's land, and she and her husband have avoided having to get loans for their farm as they pay for what they can as they go along with his income. Meaghan and her husband both have off-farm income to support their farm. Lakeesha started her alpaca farm with her husband's income and investments and noted "As far as getting started, if it wasn't for my husband, I wouldn't have been able to do it."

Lakeesha and several other women discussed the inability to get much financial help or loans from lenders due to their "unconventional" farm operation as another difficulty in financing their farms. Lakeesha remarked "When it comes to alpacas, it's like no one will give you a loan for alpacas. When I first got into alpacas, I basically had to get a loan through my vehicle and a home equity loan to get started." Brenda discussed that they were "literally laughed out of the FSA office" because of the crop she and her life partner were proposing to grow, and because they were "city kids". These experiences reflect a very complicated process for anyone trying to get started in farming, but particularly those who are proposing a non-conventional operation. Fremstad and Paul's (2020) analysis of 2012 U.S. Census of Agriculture data confirms that women are more likely to be operating non-conventional (sustainable and organic) operations than conventional farms. None of the farmers in this study who are farming a conventional operation began farming on their own. They either married in or are farming with family.

It's a vicious cycle really. Barriers to farming, including limited access to land and

capital, and sometimes labor depending on the size of the operation, can keep women from pursuing their dream of farming. As a result, women have developed strategies to move past the barriers, including farming diverse crops and livestock and utilizing creative marketing strategies such as CSAs (community supported agriculture), value-added products, farmer's markets, and online marketing. However, like many of the women in this study whose operation is what could be considered "non-conventional" – not grain, row crops, or cattle – conventional lending options are unattainable and limit their ability to have a larger, more sustainable operation. This is particularly problematic for women wanting to start a farm as Sachs et al. (2016) noted that the majority of women farmers are farming small-scale, diversified operations (non-conventional), operations that bankers and lenders are less likely to get on board with. Small-scale, diversified operations mean less income and therefore a greater need for some other form of financial income or support.

#### *Women who perceive discrimination*

When asked if women farmers have the same access to capital-related resources as men farmers, all of the Black farmers in this study echoed a similar response – not from the USDA. While some of the white farmers I interviewed also discussed issues with the USDA and their lending policies, Black women were specific in relating barriers to access due to race.

In 1997, a Black North Carolina farmer named Timothy Pigford filed a lawsuit claiming the USDA had been discriminating against Black farmers applying for loans and grants. The lawsuit was settled in 1999 and settlements paid to more than 13,000 farmers. A second settlement became necessary when tens of thousands of claims were denied for allegedly missing the deadline for filing a claim. A second settlement was then issued (Melvin 2010). However, it would seem that the *Pigford* (1999) settlements have not been successful in completely



eliminating discrimination, at least not as experienced by these women. It is important to note that three of the Black women I interviewed live in central Illinois, one in Oklahoma, and one in New York (but is a migrant farmer and moves around a lot), therefore the experiences they shared were not limited to one geographic location or USDA office.

Linda, a Black farmer who at the age of 71 is the sole operator of a small livestock farm, stated very clearly, “No. No. No.” when asked if women farmers have equal access to capital-related resources. Linda is in a unique position as a woman farmer because she has also worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture since the 1980s and thus has insider knowledge of what farm programs are available and who is most likely to receive help. Previous research found that the requirements and policies that govern USDA loan programs make it difficult for new farmers to access loans (Sachs 2006). Linda explained that USDA Farm Service Agency lending decisions are made by a county committee comprised of farmers and others in the community, and that the committees are “biased toward men, nationwide... They help thyselves. Help their kind. Help their neighbors. Help their friends. Not women or anything unconventional. Blacks. Whatever.” Linda’s first-hand knowledge of lending decisions within USDA is supported by previous research documenting the evolution of the bureaucracy of the Department of Agriculture that resulted in county supervisors acquiring political and economic power which allowed them to disadvantage Black and low-income farmers (Hinson and Robinson 2008).

When asked how she financed the purchase of her 10-acre farm and continues to cover operating expenses, Linda responded that she took out a conventional mortgage from a bank using money she had saved for most of her career for the down payment, and she continues to work even though she could retire because it pays her continuing operating expenses. When I asked why she had not tried to get a loan through USDA, she responded “I didn’t even dick

around with them”, and then added “You don’t encourage somebody to go to FSA and get a loan, not nobody of color.”

Renee is a Black migrant farmer working for other vegetable farmers. Renee has a strong social media presence and networks with many different individuals and groups in agriculture. On the day of our interview, she had just returned from Thailand where she had given a presentation about environmentalism and climate change. Renee dreams of owning her own vegetable or flower farm one day and has begun crowdfunding to raise enough money for a down payment. Because she is young (24 years of age) and does not have a history in farming other than as an employee on farms for the past 2 or so years, she has not been successful in obtaining any loans or grants. She lacks the experience required by USDA and conventional lenders, as previously mentioned, who are hesitant to (or just will not) loan money for non-conventional farm operations. Renee’s story was unique as she described her connection with the land being a form of spiritual healing for her after experiencing the trauma of her father killing her mother when she was younger. “I planted my mom in the ground and so really what I’m doing by farming is just communing with my mom. It’s the whole reason why I do it...It’s just me sobbing and, you know, knowing that those tears are connecting back to my mother’s body on this planet.” While she does not own her own operation yet and did not have a specific lending or capital-related story to share of her own when asked if women experience barriers to accessing capital-related resources, she did share some experiences with USDA she has heard from other Black women farmers, experiences she explains make her leery of attempting to go there for assistance:

No. Especially not Black women. Just what I hear from Black women farmers down South. It’s still a very prevalent thing in terms...whatever USDA person you’re speaking

to, they might lie about how many years it'll take to get a certain loan or they might misconstrue it to you so that you don't even try to do it. So they'll finesse some sort of information so that you don't feel inspired to even follow through with your application.

Interviewer: Even after the big lawsuit they've had to settle recently?

Renee: Yes, it still exists in the South. Yes.

Amy is a Black urban vegetable farmer in Oklahoma. She is also the founder and director of a national organization for women in farming. In addition to advocating for women farmers, Amy is active in promoting agriculture to middle school students to prepare them to be eligible for scholarships in agriculture at land-grant universities. When asked about women's access to capital-related resources, Amy's response was very similar to Renee's:

I would say that the paperwork involved with lending intimidates 95% of any minority person. The paperwork and the interaction with the government. And that is really what got me started [with the national organization]... These issues are real and that's why some farmers are discouraged from even continuing on. I'm real careful about who I introduce to the USDA as far as partners and things, like, because it's hard for some people, you know? And I'm like, I don't want to make these people sick or, you know, mentally sick or stressed out because you may not have the backing and support I have [in dealing with the USDA]. I'm having serious issues [helping a farmer] down in Florida because government people are just, you know, taunting her by not doing what they're supposed to do, what they get paid to do.

Virginia and Mary are Black sisters who have been farming together their whole life. Virginia is 76 and Mary is 72. Their father bought land and had a small livestock operation that they worked on, and when he passed away in 1996, they took over. Virginia and Mary have

never married, and Mary has off-farm employment to help with the farm's expenses. They shared stories of a long history of hard work and tight-knit family values. They too had a negative experience with the USDA. They shared that before the *Pigford* (1999) lawsuit, Blacks were excluded from getting grants that whites were getting and they themselves had tried and were unsuccessful. They shared that they applied for a USDA grant, but the USDA office would not accept their application. When they then tried to appeal the denial, they could not file an appeal because they had no proof that they had applied in the first place because the USDA office had not accepted their application. One result of the *Pigford* (1999) settlement was that now every application submitted to a USDA office must be accepted and the applicant must receive a Receipt of Service, a practice that according to Virginia and Mary just started in the last 3 or 4 years.

As previously stated, Black women were not the only interviewees to share negative experiences with the USDA. Pamela, a white farmer in Delaware, also communicated difficulties in dealing with the USDA in trying to secure financing for the farm she was in the process of buying at the time of our interview. Pamela has been working for other farmers for 28 years. She grew up in a construction family, not a farming family. Her dad was a concrete finisher who helped friends of his who were farmers and she got to tag along and work alongside them. Through those experiences she fell in love with farming. She has been more full-time in the last ten years helping her farming friends, but her full-time occupation is construction inspection on highways and roads, another male-dominated occupation. Pamela shared, "I always knew I wanted to own my own farm, I just didn't know what I wanted to do with it...until the last couple of years and it really got me that I want to feed people."

Pamela plans to specialize in Icelandic sheep, meat rabbits, meat chickens, and bees. She

shared that the down payment has been difficult to come up with because the farm she is trying to buy will not be big enough to be considered a business by the USDA, at least not in the beginning, and, as a result, she has had to save more money for the down payment. She discussed that she had contacted the USDA to apply for assistance as a beginning farmer, but the USDA programs will not help her. The government regulations required her to have at least 15 acres of open property for her operation and she is only purchasing 10½ acres of open property. She stated, “I get it, I’m working, but I’ll...it’s just, like, I was looking for any, anything that could help me out, and I haven’t found anything. I’m either not going into like an actual business quick enough or it’s my farm isn’t big enough for me to get any help.” Smaller farms are penalized and ineligible for USDA assistance according to Pamela’s experience. The requirements require more land and a quicker business plan that shows a profit, which is difficult to do when starting out *and* she needs to remain employed to make sure she has enough money to stay afloat. Not having a partner – a spouse or someone else who helps supplement her income – means she is on her own financially.

Other farmers interviewed shared experiences of difficulty with conventional lenders as well. Danielle owns and operates a CSA in Illinois and grows a limited crop of vegetables, mainly ginger and garlic at the time of the interview, and also raises bourbon red turkeys. She shared that she was “income-limited” when she decided she wanted to start farming but was helped by her parents the first year when they let her use some of their ground for free to get started. She also worked three part-time jobs to help make ends meet. Danielle also raises cattle with her parents, and they sell the meat to local customers. Danielle discussed that her farm operation is somewhat high-risk because farmers cannot insure vegetables like they can insure corn and soybeans (conventional crops). She adds that her experience has been that government

programs and banks do not deal with small market farmers and that they “are totally baffled” by non-conventional operations if you would even apply for a loan. She was fortunate to be able to use inheritance money, borrowed land from her parents, and off-farm income to start her operation but, due to the inability to insure her crops, her investment, like any other farmers’ non-conventional operation, is risky.

Brenda has been operating an organic vegetable operation with her life partner in Oklahoma for over sixteen years. Brenda’s response when asked if women farmers have equal access to capital-related resources also revealed a negative perspective. “No way. I mean, they’re just going to be judged...they just will be judged to be physically less capable, that they don’t have the experience or the physical ability, stamina, whatever it may be and that they will have too many other pressures if they have a family.” Brenda shared that she and her life partner had difficulty getting financing in the beginning and “literally got laughed out of the [FSA] office” because of the farming operation they were proposing. “I think just being kind of these young kids was funny to them and laughable and didn’t seem plausible.” She later discussed difficulties she has experienced as a woman in access to positions of power within the farming community:

There’s a lot of good old boy network that still exists here and absolutely like people will say to us “Oh [Brenda], you should apply to be a Conservation Commission officer or be on the FSA board, and I’m like “Are you kidding? There’s no way I would ever get elected into that position.” I mean [life partner] might have a slightly better chance, he’s a male. I mean, forget about it. Like it’s like a good old boy, it’s a bunch of old straight white men in every position of organizational leadership throughout this state. We actually just got our first female Commissioner of Agriculture at the statewide level. I can’t pretend like that’s made a difference on another fight that I won’t go into now.

Diane raises sheep in Italy. She began her farm with inheritance money from her family but in time needed a loan to help pay for improvements to the farm and grow her operation. She shared that she had to have a male partner to get a loan which turned into a disaster when the partner took her money, resulting in court proceedings to try and get her money back. She stated: “If I hadn’t done that [taken on a partner] it would have been okay financially.” I asked, “Did you have to have a partner to be able to go to the bank and get a loan?” “Yes” she answered. I then asked, “Do you think you would have had to if you weren’t a woman?” to which she responded, “Probably not.”

While most of the women expressed their perception that women were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to access to capital, only two of the women interviewed had ever purchased a farm on their own and a third was in the process. Diane purchased her farm with inheritance money. Linda purchased 10 acres when she was in her 50s after saving her entire adult life and purchasing the land with a conventional mortgage, not a farm loan or with assistance from any government farm programs. Pamela was in the process of buying her first farm when I interviewed her. Pamela shared these feelings about buying her farm:

I think a lot of times people are less apt to indulge information on those things to women.

I think a lot of times they don’t, they don’t think the women are gonna follow through or

they don’t think they’ll be able to handle it unless there’s a man in the background.

#### *Women with complex views*

Deborah was more conflicted in her perspective of women’s access to capital-related resources. Deborah and her husband bought a ranch in Colorado to raise cattle. They have since divorced but Deborah retained the ranch and maintains it on her own. She has rheumatoid arthritis and shared that she is raising cattle because when she buys beef at the store her RA

flares up. She is raising strictly grass-fed cattle in order to know exactly what her cows are eating. When asked if women experience barriers in accessing capital-related resources, she answered “I don’t think the sex or the female gender has anything to do with [access to capital] as long as everything else is there.” But later in the interview, she commented that she believes there are a lot of women that want to start farming but the programs are not there to help them:

Deborah: The money part, being by yourself and trying to do everything on your own and purchase everything on your own is a little more difficult than it is if you have a partner. Also, I just don’t think the programs are there to help them. I mean, there’s not many females that do it on their own. It’s expensive...and I’m kind of probably one of the exceptions doing it as late in life as I am but then if you are younger, do you have the money? Do you have the cash flow to get started in it?

Interviewer: Do you think it’s mainly the cash flow that is a huge barrier for women wanting to farm?

Deborah: Yep! I think so.

Interviewer: Where does the men’s cash flow come from do you think?

Deborah: I think that a lot of them are inheritance and their previous farms and stuff like that. Those of us who enjoy it and like it and have been city folks our entire life are a little bit behind the scale when it, I mean, I think we are behind it when it comes to getting started. As far as equipment or having the family to say, ‘Hey, I need to borrow your tractor and your swather’, whatever equipment you need. As a female starting out and if you don’t have that background, it’s a lot tougher to figure out how to get things done, so it just takes you longer. So I think a lot of the guys that I know that are farming or ranching have been doing it and have inherited a lot of their stuff from their family.



Deborah stated she feels accepted in her farming community but noted that it took her a while because she had to prove herself, a barrier she does not think would have been there had she been a man.

Chrissy, like Deborah, was also conflicted in her responses to these questions. Chrissy farms a conventional operation with her parents while her husband works off the farm in an ag-related industry. She grew up on the farm working with her parents and shared that she “became” a farmer when she rented her first farm from a neighbor. She shared that she wanted to be able to buy a piece of farm ground of her own and in order to qualify for a government grant or loan an applicant must provide records for three years showing that you have farm income. Her parents had originally farmed the ground she began renting but talked with the landlord and got his approval to allow Chrissy to take over to document her history in farming. She was also able to use all her parents’ equipment in exchange for helping them on their farm.

Later in the interview, Chrissy shared her belief that women have it easier when applying for farm loans because there is more financial help available for women farmers due to their minority status. However, without her parents helping her get started with land and equipment so she could accumulate three years of experience, she would not have been eligible for any government loans or assistance. While this requirement is not specifically discriminatory toward women, it would be nearly impossible to meet this requirement without family or some other support in place to acquire experience. Historically, as previously mentioned, men are more likely the heirs to the family farm and are more likely to have the opportunities for experience that qualifies them for further capital-related advantages. Therefore, in a round-about way, the previous experience policy is more likely to disadvantage women than men. Chrissy is also able to continue farming a relatively small operation – about 70 acres – because her husband has a

good job. She remarked, “I’m fortunate because my husband does have a very good job off the farm. That is why we can do what we do, and I don’t think a person...a person couldn’t make a living off of 100 acres. I don’t think they could, which is sad, but it is...you know a single person, I don’t know they could or a family could without outside income.”

### *Class privilege*

Overall, the women in this study shared the perspective that women are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to accessing capital-related resources including loans, government programs, equipment, and knowledge. Structural exclusions built into lending institutions and governmental policies together with cultural barriers prevalent in this male-dominated occupation can limit and even exclude women from pursuing a career in farming. Sachs (2018) also found that women struggle to farm or ranch in conventional agriculture because of “state policies... that often explicitly support patriarchal family farms through extension programs, government loans, and marketing policies” (12). However, it became apparent when analyzing the data that most of these women were also operating from a position of class privilege.

Brooke earned a master’s degree and left her family farm in southern Illinois for a corporate position in Chicago where she worked for a dozen years. She told her parents in the 1990s that she wanted to buy the farm from them and at that time they said, “Not now.” They assured her it did not mean not ever, just not at that time. Her father was still actively farming and did not want to quit, and he kept telling her, “You can make a whole lot more money in corporate America than you can on farming.” Brooke acknowledged that she understood that but wanted to do it anyway. Brooke left her corporate job in 2001 and returned home to work on the farm with her parents. Sadly, her father passed away a year later and after continuing the farm operation with the help of her children for four years, her mother made the decision to retire and

divvy up the property between her kids. Brooke inherited the 40-acre farm, her sister inherited the roadside vegetable and value-added products stand, and their brother, who had said he wanted the farm but, according to Brooke, did not act like he did, inherited other property. Between inheriting the fruit, vegetables, herbs, flowers, and nuts farm operation and having a severance package after resigning from her corporate job, Brooke has not applied for any loans or grants. She stated, “I’ve relied on my own capital so I don’t, I haven’t gone into debt at all to acquire equipment or buildings or anything like that. I just save up and I acquire a little at a time.” She added that she buys used equipment that she needs at auctions and tries to live within her means. She also supplements her farm income with off-farm part-time jobs, including being a township supervisor, tax preparer at H&R Block, and a cashier at a local retail store.

Kelly operates a CSA in Missouri with her husband. She earned a master’s degree in anthropology and decided she wanted to do something hands-on practical, so she got an AmeriCorps VISTA position that took her to San Francisco for a year working for a non-profit organization. It was here that she was introduced to a CSA program and fell in love with the business model. “It was pivotal for me to...have that experience.” She then got a job as an apprentice on an organic farm in the Northeast where she met her future husband. Kelly stated that by the time she met her husband she had a plan to own her own CSA but still had a little bit of trepidation trying to do everything on her own. Luckily for Kelly, her new husband also wanted to start a CSA after being an environmental engineer for over 20 years and saving money to invest in starting an operation. She also had the help of family in getting started because she had free access to family-owned land and her father nearby to help with knowledge they would need to know to get started. She explained, “Once I met [my husband], I was like ‘okay, I have a partner and, you know, we both have skills that we can bring to it’, and just, you know, it was

this is what we were gonna do, you know, there was less question in my mind because originally I was thinking I could get a job in the city and kind of work on the farm part-time while I make enough money to support myself.”

While Brenda and her life partner had difficulty accessing financing when they first got started, it is evident that together they have had the social and cultural capital needed to run a successful operation. Brenda has a master’s degree that focused on women in farming. She shared that they began their CSA in her hometown and just knowing people in the area they are farming really helped their CSA get off the ground. One of her first customers was her preschool teacher. “Just, like, that can really help you get your foot in the door marketing wise and that’s one of the hardest things that beginning farmers struggle with. I mean, yes, it’s figuring out what to plant, how much of it, which varieties, all that stuff but at the end of the day, it’s actually, you know, getting a hold in a market. That is one of the biggest challenges for beginning farmers.” Without the social capital needed for this access, they may not be doing as well as someone trying to start in an area where they know no one, or where they are not accepted as the “norm”. She and her life partner are white, well educated, and are in a heterosexual relationship, all components of privilege in society.

Alice and her husband have a chicken and goat farm in Alabama. Alice is working on her bachelor’s degree in agriculture and is also homeschooling her three children while running the farm. She does not have off-farm income, but her husband has full-time employment off the farm. She reported barriers to accessing materials for building shelter for the goats and buying equipment. Her father has given her all the land she needs to operate, but she does not have the money to constantly fence in and build structures for everything. She commented, “It’s a slow process...we just pay as we go. We just do it ourselves as we can.” While she is struggling to

grow the farm as much as she would like to, she is also privileged to have free access to the land and a husband's income that puts her household in the \$80-120,000 a year income category.

Katherine grew up in England and knew from a very young age that she wanted to farm, so her parents, neither of whom were farmers, would take her to their friend's house in the country on the weekends to let her work with their horses. From there, she went to being a shepherdess for farmers in England and then in Australia. She shared that she did not do well in school because she is dyslexic and struggled academically. Farming was what she enjoyed and where she excelled. She eventually met her husband when visiting the U.S., and after a couple of years of traveling back and forth between England and the U.S., they married. Two months later they bought their first acreage. They started with 240 acres and have grown in time to 500 acres of land and over 100 head of cattle. They have recently built a new home to retire in. When discussing access to capital-related resources, Katherine remarked:

I think it's a lot better now than what it was. You still have banking that is face-on-face with the people who make the loans and the decision. So if you have built up a relationship with your banker over the years, they are more likely to take the risk on you, um, and loan you money because of that prior history than if you went to a larger bank in the city...My husband's banked at the same bank his whole life, so we have built up a relationship with them. Would I get that relationship if I were just starting out? No. They wouldn't know who I was or what I, or who I am or my family or nothing, so I think having a history with a bank is...it still matters as to who your family is and where you come from and their history as well, it all plays a part.

Katherine's points illustrate class privilege and the benefit of social capital as well. Without the relationship with the bank, which relies on a history in the area and family privilege, someone

new to farming or to the area is not going to have the same access to a lender. Olivia offered the same argument. “I think you have to prove [to the bank] that you can do it. I’ve not had a problem because my husband’s always been there with me...I can’t really say that as a individual woman that I could walk in and, you know, take over.” She later stated that she thinks she and her husband together have built up enough of a relationship with their bank (after 54 years of farming together) that she would “guess” the bank would lend her money if her husband were gone and she wanted to continue to farm.

What is evident throughout these narratives is that without assistance from family members, spouses/partners with capital and income, and/or the ability to save for a lifetime for a down payment, these women would not be farming today. Even though many of them faced barriers to access even with the help of others, they still had advantages that many others do not. Renee was truly the only farmer that I interviewed who had no class privileges to assist in her access to her own farm operation, which is reflected in the fact that she has resorted to crowdfunding to raise money to buy a farm. She does not have the financial support of a partner or family members, she was not raised in a farm family to learn how to farm and/or have access to land or equipment, and while she has been working for other farmers for over two years to gain the experience and education she will need to be on her own, the income is not enough to be able to save up for a down payment nor is the experience she is gaining experience the USDA counts because it is not her own operation. Women wanting to enter farming who do not have the privileges afforded by class privilege that every other interviewee had, in one form or another, would have a more difficult entry or would likely not be able to start at all. I will now turn to our discussion of how the women in this study acquired the knowledge they need to farm.

## LEARNING HOW TO FARM

“I have had to learn how to do plumbing. I have had to learn how to do electrical wiring. I have had to learn how to build, do construction. I mean, I do not just – I do not know any farmer that just grows things, right? This profession is the only profession that I can think of that requires such a wide diverse skill set” (Jeanette, organic vegetable farmer). Jeanette’s observation reflects a real concern for anyone wanting to farm – farming requires a wide array of skills and knowledge. But how do you learn these skills and acquire this knowledge if you are wanting to embark on a career in farming?

The historically patriarchal structure of agriculture in the U.S. benefits men in the “training” necessary to be a successful farmer. Sons typically inherit the farm and are groomed and taught the necessary skills and knowledge to do so from a very young age. As Martina, a farmer in central Illinois, shared, “the best way to learn is by growing up in it and learning the nuts and bolts of what it takes...if you haven’t done that you’re at a disadvantage. Day-to-day operational knowledge is so very important, knowing how to navigate the markets, how to buy equipment, maintenance.” Women who did not grow up being groomed to farm yet wanting to enter the occupation of farming and/or marrying into farming face a steep learning curve. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Extension education, which was created and designed to teach farmers more efficient farming practices, has become focused on capital-intensive technologies more suited to large scale farmers and less relevant for small-scale and specialty crop farmers (Buttel and Busch 1988). This benefit that could be a valuable resource for women with smaller operations is not beneficial and an example of a barrier limiting women’s access to acquiring knowledge while benefitting industrial and conventional farmers.

To learn more about how the women in this study have acquired the skills and knowledge to farm, I asked them “How have you learned what you need to know to farm, and do you feel like you have had the education you need to be successful in farming?” As previously discussed, the women in this study have entered into farming through various avenues – marrying in, starting with a spouse/life partner, starting on their own – but their education experiences learning how to farm are very similar. Not surprisingly considering the previous research, none of them reported Extension as a source of their acquired education. Women reported learning in a variety of ways, and specifically mentioned internships, the internet, college, reading books, hands-on learning – both occupationally and by visiting other farms – and conferences as their most relied upon modes of education and training. For the women who married into farming, learning what they need to know has come by being taught by their husbands.

The women who held some type of internship or farm-related employment prior to starting their own operations reported the knowledge gained was invaluable. Interestingly, the women who held internships would all eventually own and operate a non-conventional farming operation. Danielle, who owns and operates a CSA, interned for a year before starting her own operation. She commented that she would suggest to anyone starting out to visit multiple farms prior to starting their own operation and completing at least 5 years of internships. She regrets she did not participate in an internship longer than she did but cited the need to be close to home as a reason for cutting her internship time short.

Brenda and her husband have an organic vegetable farm in Oklahoma. She met her husband when they were both working as interns on a farm in California. Brenda returned to college to finish her master’s degree while her husband continued an internship at two different farms. Brenda reports that he was teaching her things their first year of operation together that he



had learned on the farm that she hadn't "because, of course, gender division of labor. Like it was the men who got on the tractors."

Kelly, who operates a CSA in Missouri and markets value-added products, reported a similar internship experience as Brenda. Kelly also met her husband when they were both interning for a CSA in the Great Lakes area, and they then moved on to being apprentices on a farm in Indiana. They were also able to visit farms internationally and study their operations. These experiences informed the CSA model they would eventually adopt in their own operation.

Katherine, who now raises cattle with her husband in Oklahoma, worked for a veterinarian for years to gain the experience that would be valuable in caring for her own animals. She stated, "You learn by trial and error in this game, if you're not born into it." Even though these farmers weren't learning by growing up in farming, their internships, apprenticeships, and employment opportunities helped them learn the "nuts and bolts" needed to get their own farms started.

Books and the internet were reported to be very useful tools for learning by many of the women interviewed. Some discussed specific websites they relied on, such as Cornell University and YouTube (several jokingly referred to YouTube University), while others reported that various Facebook women in agriculture groups were very helpful. Alice, who has a small livestock operation in Alabama – mainly chickens and goats – reported that she is constantly studying and that her main resources of education are books and the internet: "The Facebook groups are just so valuable. Books and the internet have been my saviors." Meaghan, a cattle farmer in Oklahoma, states she is "reading everything I get my hands on", including resources on the internet. Lakeesha credits alpaca-specific websites as being the main resource for knowledge for her alpaca operation. Terisa, a medical doctor turned livestock farmer, stated: "You can teach

yourself to do anything...I can read ten books and know how to do a lot of things because I read a hundred books and I know how to be a doctor.”

The common thread throughout all these narratives was this – intentionality. Every one of these women were extremely intentional in their efforts to learn everything they could learn to be successful in their occupation. Whereas “the majority of men who are farmers have been taught by their fathers to farm” (Sachs 1983:111), others who did not have that experience must learn by other methods. The amount of time the women in this study invested in their education/internships/apprenticeships is staggering when one considers the investment of time also needed to operate a farm, not to mention any familial, off-farm employment, and/or off-farm responsibilities they have. Most of the women indicated a desire to know more and to continue to learn more. Many attend conferences to further their knowledge and networks. Eloise, a conventional farmer with her husband in central Illinois, remarked that while her husband has done a good job of “training her” to be a farmer, she would “honestly like to take classes in farming because I think I could learn a lot more just by learning hands-on. I feel like there is some parts I’m missing, like background-wise.” Pamela, who has farmed for others and is in the process of purchasing her own farm, would like to go to classes to learn how to butcher her own animals and how to be a beekeeper.

Trauger et al. (2008) and Barbercheck et al. (2009) also found that women farmers are voicing their desire for educational opportunities to improve their agricultural skills. Kiernan et al. (2012) found that women farmers are concerned with existing educational opportunities being geared toward men and toward larger farm operations, as well as being unwelcoming and hostile toward women while not focusing on the general characteristics of women’s farms. Women farmers have voiced frustration that men farmers do not want to share information (Trauger

2004). Martina, a woman farmer in this study who also works full-time in an agriculture-related government position, offered an interesting perspective on women farmers' quest for occupational knowledge. While Martina, as previously quoted, feels the best way to learn how to be a farmer is to grow up in farming and learn along the way, she believes that women farmers do have one advantage over men farmers, as follows:

I think that one advantage women could have in their ignorance if they don't have all those gaps filled is I think a woman is empowered to ask questions. I think whereas a man who's in farming, he could sometimes feel stupid quote unquote if I don't know how to do something and I'm asking somebody for something...But I think women, if they don't know how to do it they maybe, just because there's no expectation that they should know it all...in a way we have a pass that we can go and ask people things and we can ask each other things because I think that men aren't very open to that. It's liberating in many ways. Men may get embarrassed if they don't have all the answers.

Several of the women I interviewed commented that the way they have learned is by asking questions to whomever they are working with or for in their farming occupation. Peter et al. (2006) support this notion that, historically, the culture of masculinity in agriculture "sets precise boundaries of manhood" (216) in which men farmers will not discuss failures and only to some degree successes with others. They term this "monologic masculinity" and argue that monologic masculinity is associated with farmers engaged in conventional methods of farming. Because performativity of roles clearly distinguishing men's work from women's work limits the dialogue between men and women and men with other men, it is not considered "manly" to ask for help or to ask questions if you don't know how to do something. Peter et al. (2000) argue that "dialogic masculinity", a more communal centered form of masculinity associated with

sustainable methods of agriculture, encourages more open conversations between men and women, allowing for women's voices to be heard. As Martina has pointed out, perhaps this shift in norms of masculinity – at least within sustainable and non-conventional agriculture, which is where many women farmers have found their entry into farming – is contributing to the availability of space for women farmers and the opportunity for their questions and concerns to be heard, which in turn can help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be successful farmers.

### *Privileges associated with higher education*

Another important point to be considered in relation to education is the advantages, cultural and social capital, and privilege attained through college education. This sample had a higher-than-average number of women with a college education. Nationwide, the highest level of education for 27% of women is a high school diploma, 16% have some college education, and 37% have a bachelor's degree or higher (Census Bureau 2019). Women farmers in the US on average are more highly educated than men farmers. Fewer than 6% of women farmers compared to 10% of men farmers in the US have less than a high school diploma. Over 61% of women farmers nationwide report some college beyond high school compared to about 47% of men farmers. Of the 61% of women farmers with some college, 32% have a college degree compared to only 22.8% of men farmers (Hoppe and Korb 2013). For women in this sample, 13% indicated a high school diploma as the highest level of education achieved, 34% indicated some college or an associate degree as their highest level of education, and 53% reported earning a bachelor's degree or higher, which is nearly 20% higher than the national average. Fifty-nine percent of the women in this study with a college degree held a master's degree, and three of the women (18% of the sample) had either an MD or a PhD – one was a pharmacist, one was a

veterinarian, and one was a medical doctor who retired from practice to farm full-time.

The women in this sample acknowledged the benefits of formal education. Jeanette remarked that attaining her master's degree has helped her immensely with her farming operation. She not only farms but has developed a wide network of relationships with other organic farmers, is a presenter at farming conventions, and very active in helping others with information and knowledge needed for their operations. Linda attributes her ability to know what she needed to know to take care of her livestock through her master's degree in agronomy and continuing education through her employer. She added, "Education teaches you this: to be versatile." She explained that because every semester in college is different, one learns to be adaptable. Education also keeps you technologically current and if one is not educated in technology, they will be left behind. Linda believes the benefit of being versatile and adaptable is the difference between success and failure in an occupation that is constantly changing and unpredictable. She added, "The system is rigged so that your margins is like this [holding hands very close together], and if you ain't dancing as fast as you can and adapting to the changes, you won't make it." Kelly pointed out that "college gives you the skillset to know how to access farming and other random information" needed to run a successful operation. Martina pointed out that women have the benefit of being able to ask questions to acquire more knowledge, but education can empower an individual to feel like their own advocate, to be able to ask questions, and to feel entitled to a rewarding and stimulating work environment.

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Reay (2004) and Lareau (2002) had similar findings in that middle-class parents with a college education held much more cultural and social capital than did working-class parents with a high school education. The social and cultural capital possessed by the middle-class parents allowed them more confidence, self-assurance, and

entitlement to spaces of power in their social world. Reflecting on how those findings relate to my findings, I can relate the intentionality these women possessed as a result of their social and cultural capital. Not only were they intentional in learning what they needed to know how to be successful farmers, they felt empowered to ask questions, to be advocates for themselves and their careers as farmers, and to feel entitled to a stimulating and rewarding work environment. As noted, all but 4 of the women in this study had at least some college education with the majority of participants having an advanced degree.

Olivia, Renee, Pamela, and Karen all reported their highest level of education as a high school diploma, but even these women showed confidence and self-assurance perhaps as a result of acquiring social and cultural capital through other experiences that elevated their level of knowledge and self-empowerment. Olivia, who has farmed as a partner in all regards (management, labor, and decision-making responsibilities) with her husband for over 50 years, reported that her husband was a “very good teacher” and included her in everything. She remarked that she has always attended farm education meetings with her husband “because he just wanted me there” and has learned a lot of valuable information from the meetings. She stated, “I think it’s intimidating for some women but wasn’t for me because I was involved in the operation and I knew it was information that I wanted to hear.” In her 50s she became the executive director of a county Soil and Water District, a position she held for fifteen years. She then served nine years as the director. Both positions resulted in the accumulation of social and cultural capital through networking and holding a position of power. Renee has acquired confidence and status through her social media platform being an influencer for other Black (and other race) farmers. Her confidence in her knowledge and expertise has allowed her to become an international speaker and recognized expert on environmental issues. Pamela has worked in a

position of authority as a highway construction inspector. Even though she did not have any “formal” college education, Brooke shared that she went to Sweden for six months right out of high school with FFA to work on a dairy and grain farm and experienced what she called “work experience abroad”. She was immediately put in a position of authority there, being put in charge of milking and caring for the cows on the host farm. Her narrative also included stories of working alongside her husband and making farm management decisions, much like Olivia’s experiences, which translated into personal empowerment. Past research has shown that farm women relate their farmer identity to their decision-making responsibilities on the farm, so women farmers who are involved with their husbands in decision-making management of the farm operation are more likely to identify as farmers and feel more empowered (Bokemeier and Garkovich 1987; Brasier et al. 2014)

Intentionality is a form of power and every one of the women in this study communicated various sources and forms of empowerment and self-assurance through the acquirement of cultural and social capital. While college education was definitely very important in this acquirement, it was evident that other experiences, including husbands including wives as partners (not merely “helpers”), less formal educational experiences, and positions of power outside the farm were all important as well.

#### CONVENTIONAL AGRICULTURE AS A MASCULINE OCCUPATION

Previous research shows that women have traditionally been denied access to spaces of knowledge and authority in agricultural occupations and are frequently unrecognized and ignored the identity as farmers (Shortall 2001). Saugeres (2002a) argues that farming is considered to be a masculine occupation requiring physical strength and technological abilities attributed to the norms of masculinity. In order to explore this perspective with the women in this

study, I first wanted to learn more about their satisfaction with their career and how they situated themselves in this masculine space. I began by asking how satisfied they were with their farming career, asked them to discuss what they liked best and then least about their career, and then what they think it means to be a farmer. Immediately following this series of questions, I moved on to focus more on the gender structure of farming and asked each participant “Do you agree or disagree that conventional agriculture and farming is considered to be a masculine occupation and why or why not?” I will first discuss their responses to the first series of questions, and then discuss their perspective of agriculture as a masculine occupation.

Every woman interviewed reported being satisfied with her farming career. This finding is important because of the positive correlation between job satisfaction and feelings of empowerment and agency (Bock and Shortall 2006). It is also an impressive statistic given that only 49% of American workers surveyed by the Pew Research Center (2016) reported being very satisfied with their jobs. Highly educated workers and managers – employees with authority in their workplaces – reported the highest degree of satisfaction compared to workers with less education. Even in an occupation where men are dominant and considered the “real farmers” by society, the women in this study are all very satisfied with their farming career, the result of which can mean heightened feelings of empowerment and agency. Reasons for satisfaction varied from loving the lifestyle to feeling confident in their position to appreciating the challenge that farming offers. Alice stated “I love it. I wouldn’t trade it for anything. I’m a hundred percent satisfied, except for wanting more.” Nancy commented “I’m satisfied with what I do, but I’m not satisfied because I’d love to do it more.” Nancy is a registered nurse and farms part-time as a hired hand for a local farmer. She regrets not being able to farm full-time and would be willing to put her nursing career aside to do so. Brenda is completely satisfied with farming and adds



that it's a lifestyle choice, not a career. Helen, a goat farmer, responded that she is proud of what she does. Sammie, a mushroom farmer, is happy with the choice she has made and knows this is where she belongs. The overall message was one of positivity. While some women expressed frustration with the finances (which will be discussed later) and the long hours required, their overall satisfaction was 100%.

To better understand reasons for job satisfaction and to better understand these women's everyday lived experiences, I then asked, "What do you like best about farming?". The answers varied but many commented they loved the freedom they experience in this occupation. Shisler (2016) notes that women who work in agriculture feel empowered in part because of the autonomy they experience. Women who work in other gendered occupations are often working daily in a shared space with men whereas farmers work more on their own and have independence and practice agency as they run their own business. Danielle stated that what she likes best about farming is the freedom she experiences, that "...there's a thousand different ways to farm and be successful at it, and that's what I'm enjoying. I can do whatever I want and grow whatever I want." Mona states that she loves being her own boss and having the freedom to come and go as she pleases. Olivia, who farms a conventional operation, remarked "You never know what you're going to be doing from one day to the next...It's just the variabilities and it's all in your hands." Several women, including Sammie, spoke of a spiritual connection with their food. Sammie stated, "I really like knowing where my food comes from, knowing that my chicken hasn't been tortured all its life." Fifteen women specifically answered they love being outside, having a connection with nature. Lakeesha spoke of being depressed as a teenager and that being outside on her farm "gives me purpose in life and keeps me from being depressed." Brooke tied these sentiments together by stating that what she liked best about farming was

“Being outside...and being able to tackle an issue and kind of figure out how to pull a rabbit out of the hat when you don’t have a hat”.

I next asked each participant what she liked least about farming, again to gain a better understanding of their everyday lived experiences and the factors that affect (positively and negatively) job satisfaction. The most offered answer revolved around money and finances. More than half described stress due to finances and unpredictable, fluctuating market prices. Market prices are completely out of anyone’s control and contribute to the risk of being a farmer.

Katherine voiced frustration for not being financially appreciated for their end product. Jeanette remarked, “It is hard to be in such a volatile insecure financial position.” Brenda reflected for a few moments and then stated, “I wish it were more financially and socially viable and that that would be reflected in the wages that farmers earned.” Maria regrets that she and her husband don’t make enough income farming to sustain their family without her also having an off-farm job in real estate. Other “leasts” included weather and sexism. Six women commented that they like winter the least, a few commenting that it is hard on their animals and they do not like to see them suffer in the cold. Several of the women told me they do not like not being taken seriously because they are a woman farmer. Pamela, on the verge of buying her first farm, remarked “What I like least is the naysayers that keep telling me I can’t do it.” Two women commented that there was nothing they did not like about farming.

As previously mentioned, I did not put qualifiers on what a farmer “is” for women to participate in this study. I only asked that in order to participate you must identify as a farmer, whatever that meant to them. To explore their perception of what a farmer is and better understand their perspectives, I asked them “What do you think it means to be a farmer?” One concept appeared the most in the data in response to this question, and that was stewardship.

Traditionally, women in farming in the U.S. who have worked right alongside men farmers doing much the same work have been thought of by others in the farming community – and even themselves – as a helper or nurturer, not a farmer. Stewardship is synonymous with management and supervision, terms that invoke more power and authority than being a helper or a nurturer. I found this to be an interesting – but not surprising – meaning for farmer in this sample of women, that they would equate their occupation with someone who manages and cares for the land. Being a steward is a position of power and authority, characteristics that are associated with the majority of women in this sample as college educated women who have acquired more social and cultural capital as a result of their educational background.

Sammie believes a farmer is someone who will be a steward of the land and leave it in better condition for the next people. Michaela's definition of a farmer is someone who will do their best to produce a crop and take care of the land. Amy answered that being a farmer is being able to serve others, to be a steward, and to ultimately feed the world. Katherine believes that what it means to be a farmer evolves over time, but that revolves around caring for and being a steward of the land. Overall, there was a shared notion amongst all the interviewees that being a farmer is having a connection with the land, the food you are producing, and the animals (if you are raising animals). My favorite response came from Cynthia, an alfalfa farmer in Arizona who is also in a leadership position with a national agriculture association. Cynthia responded "The one thing it means to be a farmer...I feel like a rock star. I can't even think of an occupation that's any more gratifying in that respect because everybody needs us."

It was clear to me throughout this series of questions that women deeply connected with their identity and responsibilities of being a farmer. They love what they do and they do what they love. A prominent sociological perspective is that identity is constructed through social

interaction and is a continuous process that is confirmed or disputed through social relations and social interactions (Burke and Harrod 2005; Jenkins 2008). Given their perspectives of being strongly connected to their farmer identity, it was interesting then to switch gears and focus on perspectives of agriculture as a masculine occupation. When asked “Do you agree or disagree that conventional agriculture and farming is a masculine occupation, and why?”, the women responded in complete agreement – they all perceive conventional agriculture and farming to be a masculine occupation. Even though they each had a strong connection to their identity as a farmer, they were very aware that the identity most associated with farming is a masculine identity. In breaking this down as to perspectives of why they believed this to be true, a common theme emerged: the relationship between heavy equipment and physical strength.

The discussion of heavy equipment came up quite often throughout the interviews, not just when answering this question. Most of the women I interviewed did not operate heavy equipment and to some degree some seemed somewhat intimidated by it. Of the few women who did operate heavy equipment, all of whom were engaged in conventional agriculture, only one reported feeling competent in performing maintenance or actual repairs. Mona grew up on her family farm and started helping her dad and grandpa when she was very young. She attributes her comfort with mechanics and machinery to being included from the get-go. Mona has no brothers, only sisters, and she is now part-owner in the family farm operation along with her dad, aunt, and uncle. Mona agreed that conventional agriculture is a masculine occupation, explaining that “there’s a lot of physical labor and physical aspects to it. I would say overall more of a masculine [occupation] just because of the strength that is typically needed.”

The remainder of the women seemed divided between those who are frustrated that men are seen as more capable because they operate the machinery, and those who attribute capability

to men because they operate the machinery. The former group wanted to operate the tractors but felt intimidated. The latter group did not want to operate machinery and felt that was the men's job.

Danielle fell into the category of being frustrated that men are seen as more capable because they operate heavy machinery and discussed how she believes that minimizes women's capabilities as farmers. She shared her frustration that her hometown recently commissioned a mural that was painted on the side of a building depicting a combine and a farmer:

They put a man climbing into the combine with his son, and there was no thought to have even, maybe even his daughter climbing up there or a woman climbing into the combine, but you see women driving trucks, driving grain carts...it's just typically you see men running the largest and the biggest equipment in terms of conventional farming.

Brenda was also frustrated that men are seen as more capable because of driving tractors, stating, "I totally agree...there's still a perception that men do the real farm work, i.e. the tractor work."

Kelly pointed out that tractors are built more for men, definitely not for people that are not as strong. She does not drive the tractor she owns because it takes a lot of strength to apply the brakes. And this frustrated her, as follows: "I'm a FEMINIST but I don't know how to drive the tractor that we own so I'm gonna work on that this winter...things are not always built for us, you know, and so I struggle with that sometimes."

Whereas some of the women, like Danielle, Brenda, and Kelly, are frustrated that there is a perception that men are the more capable farmers because they can operate the machinery, other women believed that men *should* operate the machinery and were fine with that reality. Olivia, a farmer who farms corn and soybeans in Illinois with her husband, stated she agrees that conventional agriculture is a masculine occupation because the women cannot do a lot of the

machinery repair and upkeep. “It’s heavy work, hard work, and I myself don’t process the mechanics of it like my husband does, and my son... So I see it more as the physical stature of a man versus a woman.” Michaela also associated the masculinity of the occupation with physicality, stating “I would agree [that conventional agriculture is a masculine occupation] because of, like, the physical attributes that are necessary with having to farm.” Amy also discussed the physical strength she states is necessary for hooking up equipment, being able to “manhandle” it. “Our bodies are just not cut out for those things, so I would hire young men in to help with things like that.” Every one of the women in this study love being a farmer, but all of them acknowledge that farming is considered a masculine occupation. Chapter 5 will offer a deeper exploration of their perspectives of masculinity and femininity, and how they do and undo gender in their everyday lived experiences.

## DISCUSSION

A social structural theoretical perspective considers that women’s and men’s gendered behaviors are a result of the unequal and different positions they are assigned to in the social structure. These assignments then constrain their behavior into stereotypically female or male behavior and restricts them from stepping outside of their assigned positions even if they feel inspired to do so (Bem 1993). Analyzing the data in this study from this perspective allowed me to see that that these women farmers identified several gendered structural elements making access to their success in their farming occupation difficult. I categorized these experiences as “farming experiences that are gendered”, which included access to capital-related resources, learning how to farm, and the overall common belief that farming is a masculine occupation.

The experiences shared by the women in this study illustrate the structural barriers in place when trying to access capital to start and/or operate their farm. Barriers to obtaining loans

and grants included the requirement for previous experience in farming. Previous experience in farming is gained either through growing up on a farm and learning as you go or being employed on a farm. Because the patriarchal norms in agriculture benefit men, the majority of men who are farmers have grown up farming and therefore have acquired the requisite experience necessary to acquire more resources necessary for farm operations (Sachs 1983). A few of the women in this study were taught how to farm by their fathers. Paula, Maria, Chrissy, and Mona all grew up working on the farm with their fathers, and Maria, Chrissy, and Mona still farm conventional operations with their fathers. However, even though Chrissy had grown up farming with her parents, she was unable to qualify for a government loan to buy her first piece of land until she was able to prove she was able to farm on her own for three years. Luckily, her parents allowed her to take over one of their rented pieces of farm ground to establish that history. Not having that opportunity would have precluded her from qualifying for financing to buy her own ground. The remainder of the women in this study either had to gain their experience by working on other farms as interns, apprentices, or hired hands, or did not have any experience prior to starting their own operation. Consequently, these women have had to finance their operations through means other than loans and grants.

Another structural barrier to obtaining loans and grants was the type of farming operation. While type of operation itself is not gender specific, more women are entering the occupation of farming in non-conventional and sustainable operations because the entry cost is lower. Non-conventional and sustainable operations typically require less land, smaller equipment, and less start-up costs. The women in this study who did not grow up in farming or marry in are farming a non-conventional operation and reported problems with lenders and government agencies not willing to finance anything that was not a conventional operation of at

least a certain size. Most have financed their operations through other routes, including inheritance money, loans from family members, their partners' income and/or cash capital, and conventional loans not tied to the farm operation. None of these women reported receiving any type of capital-related assistance from the USDA.

The Black women in this study all reported negative experiences in trying to access loans and grants from the USDA. Linda is knowledgeable about the discrimination due to her "insider" access as an almost 40-year employee of USDA, as well as her own lack of access to acquire a loan for her own farm. Although Renee has not experienced direct discrimination, she has heard about the negative experiences other Black women farmers have faced in trying to finance with USDA and, as a result, has begun crowdfunding to finance her first farm. Amy's national organization tries to help women farmers through the lending process and is cautious about who she sends to USDA as she does not want to cause them undue mental stress in dealing with the hassles she has herself experienced. Virginia and Mary were actively discriminated against when they were denied the ability to even file an application for assistance, and then denied the ability to appeal that decision due to other discriminatory practices in place.

Learning how to farm is a structural barrier that many of the women in this study had to navigate as well. The patriarchal structure of farming dictates that most men who farm learn how to farm from their fathers (Sachs 1983). The majority of women in this study had to learn utilizing other resources, including internships, books, the internet, conferences, college, and trial and error on their own operations. Extension is a resource that is widely available throughout the rural US and created specifically to educate farmers, but previous research has shown that the farming education offered through Extension focuses on larger-scale, capital-intensive farms more suitable for conventional farm operators, not small scale and specialty crop farmers like



most of the women in this sample (Buttel and Busch 1988). The women in this study have had to be very intentional in circumventing the gendered structure of education in farming and have had to invest a great deal of time and energy into gaining the knowledge they need to be successful.

The last structural barrier I have addressed in this chapter is the perspective that farming is a masculine occupation. It has been well documented in the literature that the social construct of agriculture as a masculine occupation and the belief that “only men can be farmers” (Rosenfeld 1985:245) is a cultural norm, and the women in this study are all aware of and share this perspective. The results of this widely-held cultural belief that values men over women in this occupation trickle down and contribute to the other barriers previously mentioned – access to capital-related resources, education, inheritance, feelings of competence, and identity construction. Women working in an occupation in which the cultural beliefs value men, see them as more competent, and allow them full access to the farmer identity can make women feel excluded (Davies 1996) and require them to work that much harder to find ways around the barriers to achieve their goals.

It was also evident to me when analyzing the data that, even though these women encountered various cultural and structural barriers in their access to farming as an occupation, most of them also experience class privilege and have acquired social and cultural capital as a result of their education and other life experiences. The women who have financed their own operations had class privilege, along with social and cultural capital acquired through their educational attainment, to access the capital needed to start and continue farming. Other women had access to funds and other forms of capital – land and equipment – from family members and loved ones to start and continue their operations. A few of the women have been able to leverage the capital and access needed by continuing to farm with their parents. Pamela was lacking the

financing at the time of our interview but due to decades of experience farming for others and a good job, she will have access soon via a conventional loan. Renee was the only farmer interviewed in this study that did not have the class privilege the others experienced, but she has been able to acquire social and cultural capital through her social media platform presence. Time will tell as to whether this will result in acquiring the financial resources she will need to start her own operation. While these methods of access are not the same as most men farmers' access through inheritance and familial heritage, the women in this study likely would not be farming without the access afforded by class privilege and social and cultural capital.

Pilgeram (2019) noted that women have been successful in accessing farming through non-conventional and sustainable farming, a space that is generally more supportive and empowering, but that a focus on that success diverts attention away from the real barriers that many women face. Structural exclusions come from cultural barriers. Ridgeway (2009) argues that changing a dominant structural perspective such as this one is slow due to embedded cultural beliefs and daily experiences and interactions that shape our lived experiences. Gender stereotypes are embedded in social structures, including the hegemonic beliefs about gendered farming identities. Returning to Risman's (2004) argument discussed in Chapter 2 of this paper, when women see themselves as different than men, they may not see the barriers that are in place that result in gender inequality in their occupation. If we do not recognize the mechanisms of how the gendered social structure is producing gender inequality or recognize that the barriers we are experiencing are gendered barriers embedded throughout social life, we will not push for change in the gendered structure to eliminate the barriers. "We need to understand when and how inequality is constructed and reproduced to deconstruct it" (Risman 2004:445). In line with Risman's (1987) argument, it is not enough to train individual women farmers to circumvent the

barriers they experience to attain success in farming. We must work to change the gendered structure of our social world by changing policies and programs that disadvantage women farmers and advantage men farmers to see real change in the occupation of farming.

## CHAPTER 5

### GENDERED EXPERIENCES IN FARMING

In this chapter I will focus the discussion on findings that I have categorized as “Gendered experiences in farming”. These are the common narratives shared by the women in this study discussing how they experience gender and that exhibit the processes of doing and undoing gender within their occupations and everyday lives. The “doing gender” paradigm, introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987), provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding how women farmers in this study experience and make sense of their identities as farmers. “Doing gender” is a perspective that understands gender as an accomplishment achieved through interaction, of gender as an adverb instead of a noun. The *meaning* of gender is not being created through interaction but gender *itself* is being created through interaction and because it is being created through interaction it is considered natural. Women are expected to enact their femininity by being caretakers and nurturers, whereas men are expected to enact their masculinity by being strong and supporting their family.

On the farm, women are expected to “do gender” by bringing meals, running errands, and taking care of the family, and men are expected to drive the tractors and “be” the farmer. To the extent that these expectations are enacted, women and men are reproducing the expectations and thus reproducing or “doing” gender. Having historically been denied access to the farmer identity and instead relegated to the identity of the farmwife or helper, the women in this study are “undoing” gender just by internalizing and embracing the farmer identity and “broadening the notions of what it means to be a woman...by creating more meanings associated with gender” (Kelan 2010:187-188). But my goal is to dig deeper and see how they embody and enact their agency and farmer identity within the confines of the gender structure and through gendered

interactions. In what ways and to what extent are they conforming to gendered norms (doing gender) or in what ways and to what extent are they resisting them (undoing gender)? The data in this study indicate a very complex process of gendered interactions that reveal doing gender as a continuum more so than a binary of either doing or undoing. The women in this study were engaged physically and mentally in a continual navigation of interactions that both conformed to and resisted gendered norms. Their stories indicated that their various enactments of doing and undoing are not mutually exclusive but rather a more complex spectrum of both doing and undoing. These are the stories I will share.

Analyzing and conceptualizing the data from the doing gender perspective caused me to step back from the data and consider a bigger picture. Rather than focusing on singular experiences, I considered multiple experiences and narratives throughout each interview to analyze how gender was being done or undone. I used the responses to a series of questions I asked each participant to explore their perceptions and experiences related to gender. I asked questions including “Do you feel you are treated differently as a woman in a male-dominated occupation?”, “What does it mean to be masculine?”, “What does it mean to be feminine?”, and other questions related to enactments and displays of masculinity and femininity (see Appendix D for the Interview Guide). In addition to analyzing data from West and Zimmerman’s (1987) doing gender perspective I also employed Risman’s (2009) interpretation of the undoing gender approach and asked, “Are these women doing femininity in new ways – finding new ways to be women – or being more like men because masculinity is more valued in the agricultural community?” Each woman shared perceptions and experiences of how they experienced gender in their lived environment and how they navigated and reacted to those experiences.

In addition to the doing gender framework, I also employed the “doing difference”

framework to consider how gender and race intersected and interacted with the women's lived experiences. West and Fenstermaker (1995) advanced the understanding of the original "doing gender" framework with the "doing difference" framework. The "doing difference" framework argues that difference is not experienced as singular categories – as race or gender or class – but as compounded categories, and that we cannot explain inequality by only considering the singular categories. Using a "doing difference" or intersectional approach allows us to see that race, class, sexuality, and gender all intersect in distinct social environments and that it is important to recognize how individual experiences at the micro level connect to interlocking oppressions and power relations at the macro level to shape oppression (Collins 1995). Spellman (1988) argued that to understand how white privilege is sustained we must bring in difference, and to bring in difference is to "bring in women who aren't white and middle class" (4). I utilized an intersectional "doing difference" approach to consider the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality intersect and impact the women in this study's daily lived experiences in their occupations.

Several common narratives emerged from the data that were experiences shared by many of the women interviewed, including the relationship between hard work, physicality/strength, and masculinity; different treatment from others; patriarchy on the farm; outward presentation; and mothering experiences. By analyzing their stories from the doing gender and doing difference perspectives I was able to divide the narratives into two sub-categories: 1) the continuum of "doing" and "undoing" gender, and 2) the intersectionality of "doing difference". The stories I have shared in the first category, the continuum of "doing" and "undoing" gender, are representative of the women whose social interactions and experiences followed traditional gender scripts and reproduced gender differences between women and men as well as those

whose social interactions and experiences were reducing gender differences. The second category, “doing difference”, shares stories that demonstrate how race, gender, and sexuality intersect in ways that result in experiences of differential treatment and discrimination.

#### THE CONTINUUM OF “DOING” AND “UNDOING” GENDER

“Though I’m quite happy being a woman, I do feel, um, I have to work at maintaining my femininity at times in order to achieve and get done what I need to do. You kind of have to take on that masculine role in order to get things achieved and done. It’s more of a masculine attitude, but then the femininity or the female side of you...It’s almost like a split personality” (Katherine, cattle farmer in Oklahoma).

Katherine’s observation is reflective of the general sense of how women in this study negotiate the strain between being farmers and being women. As will be discussed in this chapter, there is a definite understanding among all the women interviewed that farming is a masculine occupation. What became clear to me from the data was that how these women navigate this masculine space as women farmers is a very complex process, sometimes conforming to gendered norms and sometimes resisting, as they claim their farmer identity while remaining true to who they are as women. I will begin this section with stories from women who shared experiences that were more conforming to gender norms, or whose experiences were more reflective of “doing gender”. I will follow with stories from women who shared experiences that showed active resistance to gender norms, or experiences more reflective of “undoing gender”. I will conclude this section with a discussion of these observations and how they relate to previous research by Pilgeram (2007) and Smyth, Swendener, and Kazyak (2018).

## *Doing gender*

### *Michaela*

Michaela and her husband farm a conventional operation in Indiana. Together they farm about 1250 acres of corn and soybeans and occasionally wheat. I was lucky enough to get to ride along with Michaela in her big red tractor to conduct her interview. She was doing fall tillage as we rode and talked for over an hour. Michaela married into farming. She earned her bachelor's degree in fine arts and photography and was working as a marketing manager for a fast-food restaurant when she and her husband married. Michaela quit her full-time career and started working on the farm with her husband immediately after marrying, but her financial connection with the farm – and the labor she has put into it for over 8 years now – is dependent on her marital status as everything is in her husband's name. Even though she and her husband work side-by-side throughout the year, she does not feel equally important to the operation because her husband makes all of the farming decisions, believing she is not knowledgeable enough to help make them. She also finds it “exceptionally frustrating” that her husband expects her to work with him *and* be the full-time housewife and mother, leaving all responsibility for cooking, cleaning, laundry, and childcare for their two school-aged children to her.

Michaela shared stories of unequal treatment as a woman in farming in the wider farm community as well, specifically related to physical ability and knowledge. “There are definitely times in which I know I can physically do something and a man may offer to try to do it for me and I'm like ‘I can do it’. And I just do it to kind of show them I can do it.” She remarked that she feels like she has to constantly prove herself physically and also gets irritated when dealerships question her knowledge and ability. For example, if she is calling to check on a part or a seed order, she will be asked “Did your husband tell you to call us?”



Michaela equates masculinity with being super strong (physically) and femininity with having a more well-rounded outlook on life. She considers herself to be more feminine, even when she is working, and is confident in displaying her femininity on the farm by usually having her nails done, makeup on, and wearing her own choice of attire. Rather than wearing traditional “masculine clothing” like jeans and work boots, Michaela prefers to wear hoodies, leggings, and more feminine work-type rubber boots adorned with flowers, for example. When I asked Michaela if she feels accepted as a farmer in her community, she shared the following story:

I did not feel accepted in the farming community until I had my daughter, and the reason that changed was because, well, a couple of things. I had my daughter at home. I had a home birth. Like three weeks after I had my daughter – her birthday was [early August] – we started farming and she would come with me on the tractor. I would nurse her and drive the tractor and the grain carts...So I nursed her in the fall of 2015, the spring of 2016, the fall of 2016, the spring and fall of 2017. I weaned her in the fall of 2017. So five different seasons in the tractor I nursed her and did the job I needed to do. And at that point, our neighboring farmers were like, ‘Okay, your wife’s a bad ass! I thought I worked hard. She works HARD!’ I think that’s where I was...I gained the respect I deserved while working side-by-side with my husband. My boobs would be out. A lot.

(laughter)

Michaela felt accepted because her neighbors appreciated her hard work all while tending to the needs of her infant daughter. Even though she has to deal with patronizing attitudes from others in farming businesses, as discussed previously, she now feels accepted by her neighboring farmers.

Michaela’s experiences and narrative indicate that she navigates the gender structure in

farming by doing gender and embracing her femininity. She has accepted the reality that her name is not on any of the farm property and indicates she is okay with that because she will still be taken care of if her husband passes away. She does not like being dismissed by dealerships and businesses as just her husband's helper but does not feel the need to correct them and does not alter her feminine gender presentation to "fit in" to the masculine expectations of farming. And while she is extremely frustrated with her husband for expecting her to farm *and* be the full-time housewife and caretaker, she does not mention challenging him to do more of his share in the domestic domain. It is possible that Michaela does not yet feel confident enough in her farmer identity to start challenging some of the gendered norms given her relatively short amount of time (about 5 years) as a farmer and her lack of any contact with farming prior to dating and marrying her husband.

### *Maria*

Maria is married, has two school-aged children, a full-time job in real estate, and farms with her dad. Maria's husband is also a farmer, but he farms in a partnership with his uncle. Maria grew up farming with her dad and notes that she has no brothers, just one younger sister, and that is probably why she was able to farm with her dad when she was growing up – because he had no sons to help him. Theirs is a sixth-generation farm and they grow corn and soybeans. She explained that she is an employee on her dad's farm, not a partner or part-owner, even though she has been farming with her dad for over 30 years. It is clear throughout her narrative that she was raised in a very patriarchal family structure and has fairly traditional views of gender and gendered expectations.

When asked what it means to be masculine, Maria responded that she thinks the world is emasculating men and trying to normalize the belief that the woman is the dominant person in

the household. “They’re making it like men are just these blubbering idiots who just can only do it the way women say. I did not grow up in a house like that. My dad was manly...I think that the country is doing a very poor job of making men, or giving men the, one, respect, and two, the head of the house that I think they need in order for us to raise our kids...It’s a hot topic at our house.” Her perceptions of femininity included that she believes it is okay for a “man to open your door...to carry the heavy load”, as well as to make the final decision. She shared that she is definitely more feminine and even when dressing for a workday on the farm she likes to “wear a cute hat and a cute sweatshirt”. She joked that she has a “pit crew” on the farm because if anything breaks down, she just calls her dad or uncle to come fix it.

While her connection with her femininity was quite strong and her traditional beliefs evident, she did seem somewhat conflicted when discussing the future of her father’s farm. She seemed almost wistful in discussing that she would like to have the farm one day and seems hopeful that will happen after being the one who has helped her dad for over 30 years now, but her father will not discuss that with her. In fact, he will not discuss any farm management decisions with her. “The only input I get is when he calls from the combine and wants to know what the yield count is.” She added later, “I kind of hope [that I can be more hands on in management decisions] or wish that as he starts to think about retiring he would talk to me about some of it but, honestly...he talks to [my husband] almost daily.” She thinks that if she had been a boy, her father would be more willing to include her in the day-to-day management of the farm operation and see her more as an equal like he sees her husband. “My dad will call [my husband] for advice on a piece of equipment that they have and he works on and [my husband] will call him, vice versa, so I think it’s a good relationship. At this point that’s all I could hope for.”

A few years ago, her father and her husband started farming a piece of ground together, a

venture that she was not included in, and she stated, “He goes, you know I’m not trying to cut you out. You’ve done this with me for 25 whatever years, you know this, is this gonna be okay? And I said, yeah, it’s okay you’re including [my husband]. That includes me and really, I mean, in a roundabout way it really does.” After working beside her dad her whole life, he considers her husband to be a partner, not her, and she is left to rationalize how, overall, she still benefits so it is okay.

Maria is doing gender in producing and reproducing her feminine gendered expectations both on and off the farm. She holds very traditional beliefs about gender norms and behaviors and reenacts those within her own family. She ascribes to a patriarchal model in her own home and accepts her position as “just a helper” on her father’s farm. From her descriptions, her husband, who grew up in a farm family in which the women were never allowed to farm, seems to reinforce these beliefs and behaviors as well. Rather than challenge the status quo of men being the farmers in control, they accept that the way things are is the way things are and reproduce those standards.

### *Meaghan*

Meaghan grew up being a picker in Oklahoma and California with her mother and two younger brothers. As pickers, they picked beans, peas, apples, peaches, nuts, English walnuts, and almonds. Today, she and her husband have a large cow calf operation, and she is also a farrier. She began her career as a farrier and a horse trainer nearly 35 years ago and discussed some of the difficulty she faced trying to gain credibility as a woman farrier and horse trainer. Meaghan knew gaining a reputation in her field was going to be difficult because she was a woman, so she worked for one influential horse owner for free for 60 days to prove herself. “I told him, I said ‘You pick anything you want, I will do it for 60 days and then we’ll talk about it

after, see what you think'...but that's how you get credibility, but I think a man probably would not have had to do the same thing." After that, she spent her first year working for one influential owner charging less per horse and shoeing some of the toughest horses. She remarked:

I mean, you know, it took a lot but I saw it through because I knew that to get credibility here, even just 20 years ago, that I had to do something to prove that I was all about what I said.

Interviewer: Is that because you're a woman or...?

Meaghan: Yes, oh yeah, in this area yeah. I grew up like that. Many years ago you couldn't become a vet because if you're a woman you needed a center or somebody quite high up in politics to endorse you.

Interviewer: To be a veterinarian?

Meaghan: Yeah. Many years ago women weren't allowed.

Meaghan added that she knew she would find her place within the agricultural community because "nobody could outwork me".

Meaghan shared Biblical views on gender stating that God made a man and woman and that we are different but "need each other to be complete". While she acknowledged that she believed she had a more difficult time proving her competence to others in her occupation, working for free and then at a reduced rate compared to men farriers, she accepted that as normal and shared she does not really think in terms of masculinity and femininity. She commented that she enjoys her status of being a female, a lady, and was raised to just fit in wherever help was needed on the farm. She believed that it was very important for women to be at home to fulfill the role of raising children because "it's just what God made us to do...this is what we do."

Meaghan is doing gender in following the gendered norms in her industry and within her home

and embracing what she believes to be normal and natural behaviors prescribed by God.

*Paula*

Paula has been farming her whole life in Nebraska, first with her family and then with her husband. She and her husband farm 2000 acres of irrigated corn and have 200 mama cows. She was a preschool teacher out of college and while her kids were younger, but now farms full-time and her kids are grown. Paula is very active in the wider farming community as a member of various councils and ag business groups. She feels accepted in the farming community because she has been farming so long and explained, “I’m comfortable around men so that doesn’t bother me.” She added that her mother-in-law quit her career in nursing to farm and that probably helped pave the way for her own acceptance in the local farming community.

In hearing Paula’s daily lived experiences in her occupation, farming full-time with her husband and son-in-law, it is evident that Paula is engaged in doing gender. Paula’s narrative reflects a recurring belief that men are more competent with mechanical work and tractors because they are men, and because God made them that way. She believes “they are just wired differently” than women are, and women are more wired to be nurturing. Although Paula works full-time on the family operation, her husband is considered by her son-in-law as “the boss” and they follow very traditional gender scripts. Paula was the primary caregiver for her kids when they were growing up, a decision she said she and her husband made, and she shared the following:

I mean the long days, I mean we irrigate, god we irrigate everything so I would get in at 10:00 and still need to get everybody fed and, you know, talked to, and we have four kids so it was a, you know...when football and softball practices were starting and they ran here and there...yeah, that was a challenge.

Even now that her kids are grown – her youngest is 18 – she shares that she must still provide meals, but now her daughter and her daughter’s sister-in-law are helping with the meals. They trade nights and share the responsibility, so each woman only has to cook every third night. She added “Isn’t that adorable, that those two young girls want to be a part of that?”

### *Undoing gender*

#### *Nancy*

Nancy grew up in a very patriarchal farm family. She spent the majority of her time as a child on her grandparents’ farm tagging along with her grandpa (whom she called Poppy) every chance she could get. She developed the love of farming and learned how to farm through these experiences, but there was a limit to what she was allowed to do as a girl. She shared:

I was just [Poppy’s] helper. He didn’t put me in a tractor and say, ‘go here and do this’. I was just with him and he farmed with my uncle, and if they needed help they got some guy down the road because being a girl, they were not...they were old school and they were not going to put me in a tractor or give me a full-time job, even if they know how much I’ve done it, or how much I wanted to do it it just wasn’t going to happen...

Nancy loved to work in the dirt and with the animals and knew she “had the bug” for farming but her Poppy dissuaded her, telling her she needed to get an education and work with her head, not her body. So instead of farming, Nancy went to college and double majored in elementary education and nursing. After teaching the fourth grade for a year and deciding it was not for her she went to nursing and spent years working as a surgical nurse. When Nancy’s grandfather retired and later passed away, Nancy’s connection with the farm and opportunity to work on it disappeared as the farm transferred hands to the (male) neighbor down the road.

Five years ago, Nancy’s life took a twist when she was diagnosed with stage 3 bone

cancer. The femur in her left leg was replaced with a metal one. She nearly died, endured intensive chemotherapy, and had to learn to walk again. During her extensive recovery process, she decided she wanted to get back into farming. Nancy was denied the opportunity to take over her family farm, so she went from farmer to farmer in the area, all of whom she had known all her life, to ask for a job. She was turned down by all until the last farmer she knew to ask who hired her on the spot. At the time she was seeking farm employment she was still bald from chemotherapy and had recently finished physical therapy for her new leg.

When I asked Nancy if she feels accepted in the farming community, Nancy responded she does not feel treated the same because, for one, she is not married to a farmer, and for another, because she is a woman. Nancy remarked:

I'm glad you asked that question because if I had one complaint about being a farmer or a female in farming, however you want to put that, it would be that I'm not accepted. I am more like, 'oh, she's cute', or, you know, 'oh, I see you've got your buddy out here running the agri-cart today'. One of the FS guys came out to fuel up my tractor and asked 'Are you playing with [the farm owners] today?' I just said 'I'm not playing anything and they're paying me. I'm working as hard as anyone who works for them, if not harder,' because I always feel like I have to prove that I can work hard. I have to keep right up with them...I always feel compelled to work just as hard or harder because I want them to take me seriously because I don't want them to feel like they have to pull [my weight].

Nancy's perception of masculinity is tied to physicality and perceptions of competence, a perception repeated over and over again from the other women in this study. When asked what it means to be masculine, she answered, "Strong. Capable." When asked what it means to be feminine, she answered, "I don't know why that question is so much harder than what it is to be



masculine...feminine makes me think of something soft and pretty.” Nancy responded that she considers herself to be more feminine, but that she does have to act more masculine when she is farming. I explored this further with her:

Interviewer: And how does that look? How do you act more masculine?

Nancy: I always pull my hair back. I always have my hair in a ponytail or in a bun. I don't want to look like I'm going to get my nails done at the mall, because if I show up in a dress or something or sandals or my hair is down and my nails are painted, they're going to take me even less seriously than they already do. So I always wear boots and jeans regardless of the temperature. I mean it can be 90 degrees outside, if we're doing something, I'm in boots and jeans even though I'm hotter and I could have done the same job in tennis shoes and shorts, I'm wearing boots and jeans because I need to look the part to me.

Nancy has multiple identities that she is very proud of – “the farmer, the fixer, the nurse, the cook, the mom” – and adds that at home she follows very “traditional roles”, but when she is farming it is very different. She very much wants to be treated as a competent farmer when she is farming and enacts markers of masculinity to achieve that. In her farming occupation, it is clear that Nancy is undoing gender. She is downplaying her femininity (no makeup, nails not done, hair put up, no jewelry) and accentuating more masculine traits (masculine clothing, thinking she has to work harder than other men) because she believes that is what she needs to do to be taken seriously.

*Danielle*

Danielle is a farmer in central Illinois. Her husband is also a farmer, but she and her husband do not farm together. He farms row crops with his family; she has a CSA operation and

raises cattle with her parents. Her husband's family has a very patriarchal farm organization in which the men farm and the women do not. The women in the family, specifically her husband's mother and aunt, are relied upon to fix three meals a day (and deliver them to the field when necessary) and take care of the home, even while employed full-time off the farm. The lack of equality in the home is a source of frustration for Danielle due to her husband's refusal to do any of the housework. She commented, "I could be working more hours than him and yet I'm still responsible for cleaning the house, doing the laundry, dishes – which is something he could definitely do but he's not doing...I'm paying household bills and I'm paying his bills for his farm so...it's really frustrating." She also shared frustration that she is not included in the conversations in her husband's family when discussing farm-related topics because the farmers in their family are the men.

Danielle equates masculinity with physical strength as well as "willing to do the work yourself", and femininity with being acquiescent and more reserved. She thinks of herself as being more masculine and, like Nancy, stated she has to act more masculine in her occupation "to be taken more seriously". She shared the following story about how she is perceived by others:

I wear work pants, I wear...I get so irritated, like, I wear bibs because they're really not, they're not jeans. They're from Duluth, because they're really convenient. You can put your pliers here, you've got pockets. You don't have a belt, like I am bending over all the time, and um, they're just really comfortable, and it would drive me crazy because...people tell me I look cute when I'm wearing the bibs and I just wanna vomit. Like these are my work clothes, and they're convenient, like, they're great! And I hate when people, you know, I'm wearing my work clothes, and they're like 'oh you look cute

today'. It absolutely diminishes who I am as a farmer...and no one tells my husband he looks cute when he's wearing work clothes.

When I asked Danielle if she feels treated differently because she is a woman in a male-dominated occupation, she responded "Yeah, I mean, sometimes you just aren't taken seriously, like something as simple as going to buy fence at a box store and the salesman may not, like if I have my husband with me he may want to talk to him about it where I'm the one purchasing the fence and know exactly what I want...yeah I definitely feel treated differently." She shares that other times she has to let people in her day-to-day dealings know that she is the owner of her farm. She shared an example of completing a transaction at a store where she has a tax-exempt account for her farm and whereas some stores are super easy to deal with, others are not. "They're kinda like, well, why would you be farming this? And I'm like 'well, you can look at my checkbook. It's got my farm name and my name on it so....'" She shared that "it's really irritating to be treated like you don't know what you're talking about."

Danielle is engaged in undoing gender in her interactions with others who do not take her seriously as a farmer. While she has fun dressing femininely for an inside off-farm job, she is "more comfortable with acting masculine" and wants to be seen as a competent farmer. She actively defends her position as a farmer with others in the community, like store clerks and parts salesmen, by speaking up and letting them know she is indeed the one in charge of her own farm rather than remaining quiet and letting them assume she is not. She has found moral support by connecting with other women farmers locally and via social media to discuss and share their experiences and recalls feeling very isolated and alone as a woman in a male-dominated occupation when she began farming. Like Nancy, she loves farming but wishes she was taken more seriously as a woman farmer by others in the male-dominated space of farming (including

within her own household and extended family).

*Katherine*

“I’ve always thought that when you’re a woman in a man’s world, if you’re doing what’s typically recognized as a man’s job, a woman has to do it better than the average man in order to be accepted. So I have always tried harder. Play less and talk less. I always did the jobs nobody else wanted to do, and then I’d do ‘em well, and that that would generally get me some respect.” Katherine’s quote mid-way through our interview pretty well sums up her viewpoint on gendered expectations in farming and how she navigates the gendered landscape.

Katherine has spent most of her life pursuing various farm-related occupations, from working for other farmers as a shepherdess, to working for a veterinarian to learn more about how to care for her own animals, to raising cattle with her husband. Through all these experiences, Katherine noted the need to be more masculine and shared various ways in which that was accomplished and enacted. She endured “off-colored jokes” when working with the veterinarian, particularly when discussing semen checking bulls and reproductive confirmation, and focused on the work at hand. She worked with “foul-mouthed and suggestive” co-workers on a ranch in Australia, and she would “just give as good as I got”. She shared that at times when she needed to emphasize a point, “I can quite happily...sink to any level or rise above any situation...I am quite capable of both, depending on the time and place, and I can sink to some pretty foul language if it’s necessary.” If all else failed, she shared that she would challenge “rank characters” to an arm-wrestling match. She laughed, stating, “I wouldn’t be able to beat them – I could get close to beatin’ some of ‘em – but by god I made ‘em look bad! My god the razzing the other guys would give them...that was my final trick!” Even though that trick was something she employed in her younger days, she remarked that “to this day I still use it on some

of the guys.”

After hearing the stories she shared, it was not really surprising to me that Katherine considered herself to be more masculine overall, but states she is “quite happy being a woman.” As quoted at the beginning of this section, she feels that she has to work at maintaining her femininity at times, and that she sometimes feels like she almost has a split personality because she has to take on the masculine attitude to get things done on the farm while still maintaining her caring and nurturing side. Katherine noted that “I think I have got to be more masculine just because I don’t want to be perceived as incapable. I want to be able to do and...be as good as a man in what I do, so I’ve kind of embraced the masculine side but I haven’t forgotten that I’m a woman. I do work hard at trying to remember I’m a woman (laughter)”. She dresses more masculine to be taken seriously and rejected the idea of wearing “feminized” clothing while working, noting that she is most comfortable in men’s clothes.

Katherine is engaged in undoing gender in her day-to-day lived experiences as a farmer. She believes that she needs to dress more masculine, act more masculine, and overall try to fit in by being one of the guys to be perceived as competent and capable. She has enacted many different strategies to fit in, including using foul language and arm wrestling, all while trying to stay in touch with her feminine side as well. Like Nancy, she is accentuating more masculine traits in order to be taken seriously as a farmer.

### *Brenda*

Brenda and her life partner have been operating an organic vegetable farm in Oklahoma for over 15 years. Brenda’s experiences were a little more difficult to discern when analyzing to determine whether her gendered behaviors were conforming or resisting gendered norms. Brenda is a self-proclaimed feminist, and her views of masculinity and femininity were more nuanced

than some of the other interviewees. When asked to discuss masculinity and femininity, her response was that she did not want to answer those questions “because I feel like they’re like socially imposed constructs that limit us and put it in categories and narrow our vision of ourselves in the world.” She rejects notions of masculinity and femininity as defining her identity and capabilities. She is rejecting conformity to traditional gender scripts in most ways, but where she admits she struggles in this area is in being a mother. She explained as follows:

Having a kid is super complicated. Even though I’ve been a feminist since I was an itty-bitty child without knowing it...and even though I have a partner who is super amazing and progressive, you as the female in that relationship are carrying that baby...and if you breastfeed, you’re feeding it. And it’s just reality. That if you do that work, there is less time to farm. And that dynamic is emotionally challenging and that’s something I’ve struggled with. The older my child has gotten, I’d say this is the very first year – and she is six – in which our farm work has recovered almost to pre-child levels of equity in terms of amount of time spent.

Brenda lamented that parenting issues are not discussed at farmer conferences more but acknowledges that is likely because the founding farmers in the organic farm movement were mostly white men whose wives took care of the children. She discussed that her idealism and feminist values she had when she came into farming have been challenged by the division of labor having a child created. She spent more time caring for her daughter while her partner spent more time working outside on the farm, going to the farmer’s market earlier, and doing more tractor work. She remarked “I know I think if we hadn’t had a child, I do not think this gender division or that, like, division of labor would be as pronounced as it is” and likens the transformation of the division of labor to “the slow erosion of, you know, equality...”

Later in the interview, Brenda added that she and her partner have made the choice to homeschool their daughter, which became “a point of conflict” in the second half of her kindergarten year. During the first half of the school year, Brenda said that she and her partner shared the teaching duties equally but as the second half of the year rolled around, her partner basically “took himself out of it” and dedicated all his time to the farm, leaving Brenda to be in the house to teach. At the beginning of the next school year, Brenda pushed back and resisted the erosion of equality in her relationship at being the sole parent in charge of her daughter’s homeschooling. She initiated dialogue with her partner and insisted on a more equitable distribution of time spent in caring for their child.

There was like no way in hell I was gonna go back to what happened last spring where it all like falls down on my shoulders. I just like, literally physically and emotionally can’t do it because it’s a big job and it’s stressful and it felt super unfair and I felt I was getting stuck in this, like, another elective division role...for him, he felt like he was the one thinking about the farm more. That was not true but that’s what he thought. And therefore, he felt like entitled to just sort of step out of the schooling and into the farming, and so, I mean, this is like more of a personal relationship issue but it is still tied into, like, the physicality of having a kid...like, he just doesn’t understand his privilege of not having grown, and like, then, grown through nursing a child.

Brenda reported that after their talk they had returned to an equal share of childcare responsibilities and farm work and she is much more satisfied with their current arrangement.

Brenda’s dilemma with childcare and mothering is not unique. Twenty-three women in this study reported having at least one child. Many of the children at the time of their interview were grown adults and so the difficulties of trying to run a farm operation and care for children

were behind them, but for those who still had younger children, all shared similar stories of trying to juggle parenting with farming. Unlike many of the other women, however, Brenda challenged the gendered division of labor in childcare and pushed for a more equitable allocation of parenting responsibilities which resulted in an outcome she is happy with. She is actively engaged in undoing gender by resisting the gendered structure of the traditional power balance within the family that expects more parenting responsibilities from mothers than fathers. In turn, she is experiencing more time engaged in her farming career.

### *Discussion*

Analyzing the data utilizing the doing gender perspective allowed me to see how each woman experienced gender in differing ways. The percentage of women in this sample whose experiences were more aligned with “doing” gender compared to those whose experiences were more aligned with “undoing” gender were pretty evenly split. About half of the women were conforming more to gender norms and half were actively resisting. However, recognizing that doing and undoing gender was contextual and more of a continuum or spectrum than mutually exclusive categories in this data, I categorized these experiences as “Doing and Undoing Gender” and then sub-categorized and offered examples of women who were more engaged in doing gender and those who were more engaged in undoing gender. The data revealed several common narratives that are explored within each sub-category: the relationship between hard work, physicality/strength, and masculinity; different treatment from others; patriarchy on the farm; outward presentation; and mothering experiences. Within each sub-category I shared individual women’s stories that demonstrated these common narratives.

Gender as an outcome of social interactions, as a performance rather than a set of essential or biological characteristics, is a theoretical perspective introduced by West and



Zimmerman (1987) that guided the analysis for this chapter. In response to West and Zimmerman's (1987) "doing gender" perspective, Deutsch (2007) introduced her "undoing gender" framework to draw attention to how women and men accomplish sameness, not just difference. Deutsch (2007) argued that "doing gender" refers to the reproduction of gender differences, or interactions that conform to gender norms, and "undoing gender" refers to social interactions that resist gender norms and reduce gender difference. I examined the ways in which women farmers negotiated their gender identities in relation to their descriptions of what they believe to be competent farmers. Some of the women in this study were more engaged in doing gender – their interactions and behaviors were conforming to dominant gender norms while following established gender scripts. Some of the women in this study were more engaged in undoing gender – their interactions and behaviors were resisting the gender norms in an occupation dominated by men and masculinity. However, as previously stated, it was evident that none of the women were exclusively "doing" or "undoing" gender but rather engaged in various enactments of both.

Michaela, Maria, Meaghan, and Paula were all included in the category of women "doing gender". These four women and others in this study sharing similar experiences and beliefs are more engaged in conforming to dominant culturally constructed feminine traits and behaviors. They shared accounts of doing gender in socially appropriate ways by producing and reproducing gender difference in their behaviors, ideals, and enactments of their essential femininity. While they all agreed that farming is a masculine occupation, they each had various ways in which they conformed to and reproduced dominant feminine-coded gendered norms while claiming the farmer identity.

Michaela's husband has kept her name off any property ownership of the farm and her

only financial protection is life insurance and her name on the will should he die first. In the event of a divorce, her connection to the farm that she has helped build and maintain will be severed. While she expressed extreme frustration at her husband's expectations that she performs the labor of being a farmer and being the family caretaker in charge of all housework and childcare, she does not push back for a more equitable division of labor. Maria has farmed with her dad for 30 years but does not challenge the gendered norms in her family that favor her husband as a partner or equal and not herself. She hopes to one day inherit the farm, but her father will not discuss it and, given his more recent partnership with her husband and not her, it seems likely that her husband would be more in line for inheriting than she does. Maria also holds very traditional gendered beliefs and is very connected to her feminine identity. Meaghan discussed how she had to work for free and at a reduced rate of pay to be considered competent in her field but accepted that as normal. Meaghan also holds very traditional gendered beliefs that also align with her religious beliefs that God made women and men to be different and to perform different (gendered) functions. Paula farms alongside her husband on their family farm but concedes that he is "the boss" and subscribes to very traditional gendered norms in which she was the sole caretaker of their four children and continues to be the meal provider, even when working until 10:00 at night. She is encouraged that one of her daughters is now taking on the gendered responsibility of helping with the meals even though her daughter no longer lives at home and has a full-time off-farm occupation.

Nancy, Danielle, Katherine, and Brenda were all included in the category of "undoing gender". These women and others similar to them in this study were downplaying feminine characteristics and "doing" masculinity so as to fit into the masculine structure of farming and be considered capable farmers. While they are subverting feminine gender norms while farming,

they are constructing behaviors that align with the masculine-coded expected behaviors of farmers. Women farmers find themselves in a paradoxical situation – if they appear too feminine, their abilities as farmers are questioned, but if they appear too masculine, their abilities as women are questioned. As these women communicated, navigating these expectations is frustrating and at times difficult.

Nancy discussed that she is consciously making sure she is working just as hard if not harder than men farmers she works with to be taken seriously. She is presenting herself outwardly when farming to be more masculine by wearing her hair back with more masculine clothing and shoes, with no jewelry or other common markers of femininity. She does not hesitate to push back if diminished by someone in the ag industry. When she is not farming, she is happily engaged in behaviors she considered to be “traditional” (feminine-coded) such as being the family caregiver. Danielle agrees that she has to act more masculine in her occupation to be taken seriously and also engages in pushing back if someone attempts to diminish her identity as a competent farmer. She dresses for comfort and function and is irritated when people tell her she is dressing “cute”. She is also engaged in the “traditional” feminine expectations of taking care of all housework but resents that her husband has relegated that responsibility to her. Katherine admits that she has embraced her “masculine side” and resorts to masculine behaviors of arm-wrestling, foul language, and dressing more masculine to be perceived as a capable farmer, but admits she also works at remaining in touch with her femininity. Brenda is a self-described feminist and rejects notions of masculinity and femininity that define her identity and capabilities. However, she shared that she has had a difficult time navigating the gendered expectations related to mothering that have kept her from experiencing her full capabilities as a farmer. She has engaged in negotiating with her partner and has achieved a more equitable

division of childcare within her family unit in order to undo the traditional power structure making childcare the mother's sole responsibility. While Brenda is not performing masculine behavior in order to be considered capable in the same ways that Nancy, Danielle, and Katherine shared, she is actively rejecting the gendered norm of being the sole caregiver for her child and thus enacting a more masculine-coded behavior of valuing her occupation equally with her status of mother.

Overall, nine women in this study identified as more feminine than masculine, including Michaela, Maria, Meaghan, and Paula. However, there was not a clearly defined difference between women who identified as feminine compared to women who identified as masculine and how they were “doing” or “undoing” gender. There was also not a clearly defined difference between types of farm operations, level of educational attainment, or geographic areas in which women were more or less likely to identify as feminine or masculine and more likely to do gender or undo gender. The only connection that was evident was that women who identified as being more masculine were more actively undoing gender in their everyday interactions. These findings suggest that some, but not all, women who identify as more feminine believe they must resist femininity and do masculinity in order to be considered a capable farmer. Some women who identify as more feminine, such as the four women focused on in the “doing gender” section of this chapter, are comfortable embracing their feminine identities and do gender in ways that reproduce feminine gendered norms in spite of the fact masculinity is the cultural norm in agriculture.

Women whose narratives aligned with behaviors and interactions I have categorized as “doing gender” communicated beliefs that reinforce men's dominant positions in agriculture in believing that men are more physically strong, more mechanically inclined, more able to handle

equipment, and overall more capable as farmers. The traits these women identified as feminine traits included being more feminine in their outer presentation (how they were dressed and groomed), reserved, less physically strong/weaker than men, and more nurturing and emotional. Much like the policewomen in Rabe-Hemp's (2009) study who did gender in their occupation in socially appropriate ways by adopting the feminine expectations of being more empathetic, soft, and nurturing while resisting masculine-coded behaviors of being aggressive and violent, the women farmers in this study who were doing gender were also adopting feminine expectations of being reserved, accepting the status quo of patriarchal farm structures, and shouldering the primary responsibilities of taking care of their families. Shisler and Sbicca (2019) found that the women farmers in their study subverted masculine norms in agriculture by embracing feminine behaviors and argued that in doing so were finding new ways to be women instead of being more like men. Rabe-Hemp (2009) and Shisler and Sbicca (2019) both argued that the women in their studies were finding new ways to do gender in tandem with their masculinized occupations. I would argue that performing feminine-expected behaviors through interactions with others is not finding new ways to do gender but rather continuing to do gender in the way they have come to understand their position in a gendered structure, which reifies and reproduces the existing gender structure. As long as there is no resistance to the structure in place, Michaela will likely never have her name on her husband's farm, Maria will not inherit her father's farm or be considered an equal partner, Meaghan will feel like she has to work for less pay to be seen as equal to men because God made men and women to have differing capabilities, and Paula will still be responsible for performing the care work for her grown but growing (to now include sons-and-daughters-in-law) family.

Previous studies exploring the relationship between gender and self-identity demonstrate

that interactions in the workplace and at home are closely connected to gendered norms and expectations and how individuals perceive their gender identity (Smyth, Swendener, and Kazyak 2018). Similar to the findings in this study, Pilgeram (2007) found in her study of how women in conventional agriculture “do gender” that some women struggle with the desire to maintain femininity while at the same time exhibiting masculinity to fit into the farming industry. Some of the women in Pilgeram’s (2007) study and in my study found they must dial down their femininity to display a more masculine image to be considered competent and successful in their occupation. However, whereas Pilgeram’s (2007) main conclusion was that “women’s success is intricately tied to their ability to reproduce a performance of hegemonic masculinity” (592), my findings indicate that women who were engaged in “doing gender” by engaging in more feminine-coded interactions are also successful in their occupations as farmers. This finding supports my argument that “doing and undoing” gender is more of a complex continuum than either/or categories. The women in this study all had a strong connection to their farmer identity regardless of their gender self-perception and enactments of gender interactions, or how they were “doing” and “undoing” gender. Whereas some of the women were interacting in ways that would be considered “doing gender”, they were also performing tasks and behaviors as farmers that are masculine-coded and therefore in their day-to-day activities are also “undoing gender”. Other women who are actively “undoing gender” by acting and interacting more masculine as farmers are also performing traditionally feminine behaviors non-occupationally to remain in touch with who they are as women, thereby “doing gender”.

In their study of women farmers examining the relationship between gender self-perception and farm work utilizing a gender self-perception scale, Smyth et al. (2018) found that more involvement in farm and ranch tasks resulted in a more masculine self-perception. The

more the women in their study were involved in the manual and nonmanual farm labor tasks on their farms, the more masculine they perceived themselves. The data in my study do not align with Smyth et al.'s (2018) findings. While gender self-perception and gender enactments varied among the women in my study, all the women in my study were hands-on involved in the day-to-day operations of their farm and therefore task involvement was not related to gender self-perception and interactions. The difference in findings could be due to the geographical and farm operation diversity of this sample compared to the sample being limited to Washington State and wheat and cattle operations only in Smyth et al.'s (2018) study or could also be attributed to the difference in the research method. This study utilized in-depth interviews to get a more nuanced understanding of women's perceptions whereas the Smyth et al. (2018) study utilized self-perception scales, limiting the depth and understanding of the perceptions of the women in their study.

A main question I addressed in this study was "Are women farmers doing femininity in new ways in farming or being more like men because masculinity is more highly valued?" Deutsch (2007) argued that because gender is a social construction it can also be deconstructed by dismantling gender differences, by challenging the existing gender norms through enactments of "undoing" gender. A main conclusion from this study supports implications from both Pilgeram's (2007) and Smyth et al.'s (2018) studies: Women who are engaged in enactments of "undoing gender" are doing so to fit into the masculinized space of agriculture. These women were negotiating their gender identities in reaction to what they believe are characteristics of competent farmers and were "doing" masculinity by dressing, acting, and talking more masculine while resisting or "undoing" feminine characteristics. Based on this conclusion, I argue that women farmers engaged in enactments of "undoing gender" are transforming their

own behaviors to align with existing norms – they are being more like men because masculinity is more highly valued. Even as some of the women are resisting femininity and doing masculinity, the gender norms do not disappear. As McDonald (2013) concluded in his study of male nursing students who were undoing gender, “Even as gender is undone, the existence of gender norms is confirmed because the recognition that a certain performance of gender lies outside conventional parameters reifies these parameters as the norms” (566).

## DOING DIFFERENCE

The racial experiences shared by the Black women in this study were much different than those of the white women, a finding that strongly supports the need for an intersectional approach, or in extending the argument of “doing gender” what West and Fenstermaker (1995) termed “doing difference”. Applying an intersectional perspective allowed me to consider how gender and race (and sexuality) are interlocking oppressions that together shape individual and structural inequalities. West and Fenstermaker (1995) argued that individuals simultaneously experience race, gender, and class differences, and that these differences are made normal and natural in the organization of social life.

All of the participants in this study were asked, “Are there any race-specific barriers or challenges you experience as a farmer?” As previously reported, this study sample included 5 Black women and 27 white women. It became evident in the data that race is taken for granted by many of the white farmers in this study. While a few of the white respondents acknowledged their whiteness as a privilege, most answered in a way that did not recognize race. Some examples of the few white farmers that did recognize race included Jeanette, a white organic vegetable farmer (discussed later in this section), who answered “In my community I guarantee you I would have had a much harder time [getting started with my farm] if I were anything but



white, there are just so many more biases in a rural community.” Kelly acknowledged the privileges she has experienced as a white farmer, pointing out that her family had the farm she is on and other farms before that one and that had they been a family of color they probably would not have had the same access to loans or ways to gain capital. And Helen, a goat farmer, answered, “It’s probably easier for me. I’ll admit it, absolutely.”

Cynthia, a white alfalfa farmer who is in a leadership position with a national agricultural organization, responded, “That’s a question I’ve never even considered, to be honest.” She continued to discuss how there are very few farmers of color overall in the U.S., and that in her position of power in a national agricultural organization she has never considered being white as a privilege because she is “color blind”. A few of the white respondents responded that being a race other than white resulted in advantages or privileges not afforded to white farmers. For example, Deborah, a cattle farmer in Colorado, responded:

I think if I was Black, I would have more access to more things, like grants and loans and things out there for the Black side of it more than white women...I think they are trying to pull more of that into the farming community but it’s like, okay, you are forgetting the white woman who’s been around and wants to be a part of this but not the opportunities that anybody else is getting. I think that it’s biased in that way.

Paula self-identified as white on the Information Sheet completed prior to the interview, but when interviewed she responded, “[I’m white] unless there’s government money and then we can be, you know, whatever you want us to be but yes, we’re white.”

It was evident in the data that Black women in this study all experienced gender in a way that intersected and interacted with their identities as Black farmers. Jeanette, the one participant in this study who identified as lesbian, shared her experience as a lesbian women in a

heteronormative farming community that demonstrates the intersecting of gender and sexuality.

*Linda*

I was able to interview Linda in her off-hours at her place of work, a USDA office in Illinois. Because her farm is a small livestock operation mostly for her own enjoyment, she shared that her interactions as a farmer are limited to her neighbors. The experiences with her neighbors that she shared demonstrate differential treatment due to her race and gender. She remarked that some of her neighbors have an attitude and treat her like she should be grateful to have what she has. As a result, she has fenced in and gated her entire property, commenting “My culture teaches me to have everything gated. I had a survey of my property before I bought it. I take steps where...there will not be a problem because there is nothing to be a problem on my end. Country life is a strong...lines of demarcation, meaning I need to know what’s mine and you need to be aware of what’s yours.” Linda added that she has no kids or boyfriend that interfere with the neighboring properties and so therefore there should be no problems, but she gets attitude from her neighbors wondering how she has what she has. None of the white women that I interviewed mentioned having issues with property demarcation or attitudes relating to property ownership.

Unlike her farm operation in which she has little contact with others, Linda’s gendered interactions with farmers through her government job are frequent and ongoing. Linda has had a long career with the USDA, and due to a mobility clause associated with her position she has moved around to different offices in Missouri and Illinois throughout her career. The moves brought her into contact with countless farmers and varying cultures of acceptance of women with decision-making responsibilities in USDA and, in particular, women of color in these positions. Linda’s experiences with USDA clients demonstrate that she has had to navigate

gendered and racial barriers in order to do her job. When I asked if she felt treated differently in her work position, she shared stories of how she's been treated by farmers at the office and out in the field. She shared that if a farmer comes into the office and does not want to deal with her, she will refer them on to another employee but that will require them to wait longer. And if she ran into trouble out on a farm visit, she would have to use other tactics for contacting the farmers. She explained:

You know, I'm too old for that. I'm not trying to make you have a different outlook on my ethnic background, or me being a woman, or any of that... There's a limited amount of people in this office to work there. We're all doing our best to help you. With your individual problem or concern. And if you don't want to deal with who's next, the pop-up cube that's next or the number who's next, no problem. We'll put you at the end of the line and let you, uh, have the next opportunity that comes available... If I went to a place and the people were not nice, I'd leave and go back to the office and say, "I didn't like, they had the dogs running around and they didn't even do anything"... they wouldn't put 'em up, or tell me I could go to the back 40 and they'd meet me in the shed or something like that, I wasn't goin' to do that... you know, this is not a job where you need to be submissive. You go to religious work when you wanna do that.

Linda's experiences with farmers are very different than her white counterparts in this study. White interviewees in this study shared experiences of being discredited because they are a woman in this occupation, but none shared experiences in which they also felt discredited because of their race. The interactions Linda shared are very complex and it is evident that Linda's experiences reflected negative racial attitudes in addition to being discredited for being a woman in a "man's" position with USDA. In order to continue to try and work with the farmers

who would treat her negatively on farm visits, Linda shared that she would then go “to the coffee shop” (she would deliberately cross paths with them in a public place) and confront the farmers there in an effort to let them know she was there as an employee of the government to assist them. Linda has been engaged in a career-long effort of confronting and overcoming racial and gender barriers, or “doing difference”, in which she has to push back against racist attitudes and gendered norms in order to effectively do her job *and* to claim her identity as a farmer. When discussing racial barriers or challenges she faces as a farmer and within her career, Linda stated she gets the impression that white people in particular seem to be jealous of what she has accomplished but that she has worked just as hard if not harder for everything she has accomplished. She added, “You know, you put on your big boy pants and your big girl pants and you step it off. You dust yourself off and carry forward.”

#### *Virginia and Mary*

Virginia and Mary are sisters who operate their small livestock farm together. They shared stories of doing everything together as a family when they were growing up, including their shared responsibilities on their parent’s farm. Virginia commented “Life is not all about money. Life is about family...we did everything together.” The sisters described the farm as something they love to do, not necessarily as a money-making venture. They took it over when their father passed away in the mid-1990s and they raise a menagerie of animals including goats, ducks, chickens, pigs, cows, sheep, and turkeys. Mary remarked “We don’t own livestock. God has provided that for us to care for. But they belong to God and we’re just the caretakers... What’s most important is God’s animals out there. If they make the money, good, we’re happy. If they don’t make the money, our animals are well taken care of. We’re happy.”

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a gender wage gap in farming reflected in the fact that

women farmers earn only 60.7 cents for every dollar earned by men farmers (Fremstad and Paul 2020; Picchi 2015). The size and type of farming operations both contribute to the gap in earnings (Fremstad and Paul 2020). Not specifically considered in this analysis, however, is race and race discrimination. It was evident in Virginia and Mary's experiences that race discrimination has affected their ability to experience equal income when selling their livestock. They shared that when their father would sell cattle, he would have a white man from a neighboring community "come and get our cattle and take it to the market to sell". The reasons were twofold – to avoid an excessive weight reduction when they got the cattle to the sale barn, and to avoid a reduction in sale price because he was a Black man.

Once the sisters took over the operation in 1995, they took the cattle to the sale barn themselves but quickly realized they were being discriminated against. They weighed their cattle before leaving the farm, and between the farm and the sale barn, a 40-mile drive, the cattle would "lose" 300 to 500 pounds. According to Drovers.com (2014), cattle losing weight in transport, a process called "shrinkage", is normal. Stress caused by being rounded up and loaded on the trailer contributes to shrinkage, as does withholding food and water prior to transport and the transport itself, but not to the extent of what Virginia and Mary experienced. At one sale, Mary recounted sitting in the sale arena waiting to watch the auction when the auctioneer made it known he wanted her to leave. They brought her bull out first and then asked her to leave after it sold. Since that time, they have started taking their livestock to a different auction barn that treats them more fairly, but they have to travel twice as far to get there.

Another experience Virginia and Mary shared involved negative treatment from neighbors, similar to Linda's shared experience only with a much worse ending. Virginia and Mary have neighbors who do not like that they are there and have asked to buy their property

continually over the years to get them out of the neighborhood. It is a rural area, but they still have neighbors. After refusing to sell the property for years and enduring negative comments and treatment from neighbors, a house on the property that was filled with family antiques and heirlooms “mysteriously” burned to the ground one night. Thankfully no one was living in the home at the time and no lives were lost, but a lifetime of memories went up in smoke.

### *Renee*

Renee is a Black migrant farmer who has worked on multiple vegetable farms for the last several years. Renee shared that she feels very accepted and trusted within the Black farming community, but not the white farming community due to her lack of experience in farming and because she is single and not farming with a partner. Like Linda, the experiences Renee shared indicate her gendered experiences are also intersecting with negative racial attitudes from others. She communicated throughout our interview that she is very connected to her feminine identity and spoke often of her connection to the soil and “Mama Earth”. Renee is ultimately “doing gender” in the way she presents herself outwardly:

I actively farm with earrings and jewelry on, and I’m often told that that’s not allowed or welcomed, or I’m questioned about it...and I think how tight my clothing is plays a big role in judgment from others too. But how I look when I’m farming is how I look when I’m farming and there is some judgement sometimes that I’m not a competent farmer because I quote/unquote look too sexy or I have on too many accessories.

Even though she feels judged for how she presents herself, she is who she is and dresses the way she wants to dress.

Farming for Renee is very therapeutic, and she looks forward to the day when she owns her own operation where she will be the farmer in charge and not be subjected to the

discrimination and unequal treatment she has been subjected to as a migrant farmer. She shared with me that her vision as a farmer is to “create a new business model for a regenerative agriculture that provides equity for the farmer, affordability for the customer, and harmony for Mama Earth.” She added that every time she shares that vision with a white farmer, “they laugh at me.”

Within each new space she has worked, Renee said she tried to understand each operation from start to finish, a learning process that would assist her as she begins her own operation someday. She shared stories of many farm experiences she has encountered thus far, many of which suggest differential treatment on farm operations due to her race and gender. For example, on the first farm she was employed, she was asked multiple times by the farmer’s brother to be a stripper in his nightclub. At another farm, an apple orchard, she was working with primarily Mexican women in a processing room. Even though there was a language barrier as Renee shared she does not speak Spanish, the women warned her not to go outside to pick apples with the men because in that space she was likely to be harassed and even raped. While working on a cannabis farm, Renee learned that women are only called in for trimming the cannabis and are not involved in any of the other processes, like planting, harvesting, or de-leafing, because those jobs are handled by the men, a practice Renee finds “very problematic”.

Another interesting viewpoint Renee offered was her relationship with the land, which from her perspective is also very racialized:

I think sometimes the way I’m experiencing land is not the way other white people who I’m farming with are experiencing it...I understand that this is just a narrative, but when someone is the head farmer there’s a tone that is normally used by white men who are in these roles and for me it just sounds very reminiscent of a slave master and it throws me

completely off, and I can understand that to, you know, the white woman that I am farming next to, they don't hear it or see it, but for me that's how I receive it. Sometimes it triggers me and makes me not talk sometimes or just shut down mentally.

Overall, through all of her experiences on different farms and farm operations, Renee feels that men are considered to be the competent farmers in charge of anything to do with machinery – tools and tractors – and women are more channeled to tasks like planting and caring for plants. Her experiences reflect the interlocking rings of racism, classism, and sexism as she strives for equal treatment, but her vision and goals are diminished due to her status as a migrant Black woman farmer.

### *Jeanette*

Jeanette is a lesbian who was new to farming and to the area where her farm is located when she and her wife began their operation a little over 9 years ago. Upon relocating to the area, she developed a close friendship with an elderly farmer and his wife who are from the area and very well-respected. She discussed that coming into a community where generations of conventional farm families have lived and trying to farm something different (she farms an organic vegetable operation) is going to result in differential treatment but that her friendship with the elderly farmer and his wife “paved the way” for her acceptance from others in the farming community. When exploring gender differences in treatment, she remarked, “If anything I might be treated differently because I’m a lesbian more so than because I am a woman.”

Jeanette told me that she now feels accepted in her farming community and that her unwillingness to “take bullshit” from anyone has benefitted her. She also believes her work ethic has resulted in acceptance in her community and states she has been referred to as “a real hard worker”. She added “What is really important to people out here, you have to be a hard worker.”



Jeanette could not think of any specific instances she wanted to share of being treated differently because of her gender or sexuality, just an overall experience of differential treatment experienced when first trying to fit in to her new surroundings, a process that was navigated with the help of an elderly farmer and being “strong-willed enough” to know that she could do it. She added that in her community, she also benefitted from being white as she feels she would have had a “much harder time if I were anything but white because there are just so many more biases in a rural community.” Jeanette’s narrative demonstrates her experiences with differential treatment based on sexual identity, gender, and race. She has had to navigate her space as a lesbian woman farming organic vegetables in a heteronormative community where the norm is conventional agriculture and acknowledges her path to acceptance was paved by an elderly farmer, her work ethic, and her whiteness.

### *Discussion*

Linda, Virginia, Mary, Renee, and Jeanette were all included in the category “doing difference”. The experiences these women shared demonstrated how race, gender, and sexual identity must all be considered intersectionally when analyzing the realities of lived experiences. Linda, Virginia, Mary, and Renee’s gendered experiences were affected by their situated position in agriculture as Black women in a white-dominated occupation. Less than 1% of farmers in the United States are Black, compared to over 97% of farmers who are white. The discrimination they experienced included negative attitudes from others, boundary and land disputes, sexualization, and discrimination at auction barns when selling their animals. Jeanette experienced differential treatment as a lesbian farmer in a heteronormative culture. These stories are important because we will never know the true experiences of women farmers until we know the experiences of *all* women farmers, and the voices of Black women and homosexual women

farmers are all but missing in existing literature focusing on women farmers.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on findings I categorized as “Gendered experiences in farming” utilizing the “doing gender” framework, as well as intersecting categories of gender, race, and sexuality utilizing the “doing difference” intersectional framework. This analysis revealed that “doing gender” was more of a spectrum or continuum for the women in this study. Some of the women’s narratives indicated they were knowingly conforming to gendered norms, or “doing gender”, in their daily experiences as women farmers yet their shared behaviors also indicated they were actively performing masculine-coded behaviors (“undoing gender”) in their farming occupations. Other women’s narratives indicated they were “undoing gender” by actively resisting gendered norms in their farming occupation in a deliberate effort to enact masculine-coded behaviors while also enacting gendered norms by “doing gender” in their off-farm interactions and relationships. I was also able to show that women engaged in enactments of “undoing gender” are transforming their own behaviors to align with existing norms that value masculinity more highly than femininity and thus reifying the gender norms in place.

The Black women’s narratives in this study indicated a stark difference in their lived experiences as Black women farmers in contrast to the racial awareness and experiences from the white women farmers. Where it was evident that race was either taken for granted and not recognized or somewhat recognized as a privilege by the white farmers in this study, narratives of discrimination and unequal treatment due to race and gender were recounted by the black farmers in this study. Finally, I demonstrated how Jeanette’s perspective of being a lesbian white woman farmer in a traditional agricultural, heteronormative community revealed the interconnectedness of sexuality, race, and gender in navigating her occupation as an organic

vegetable farmer.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

[Women farmers] are getting stronger...people see, not just women in the kitchen making food, but women ‘making food’, women making the beginning of food. This is our future!” (Helen, goat farmer in Illinois)

If you keep steering people away from being a farmer, we’re not gonna have farmers to produce good food, right? [I believe] women are going to lead the country in feeding America!” (Amy, urban farmer in Oklahoma)

Women have always been involved in agriculture but have only recently begun to identify as farmers and claim spaces of knowledge and authority in the traditionally male-dominated occupation of farming. The number of women farmers is steadily increasing in this country while at the same time the number of men farmers is decreasing (USDA 2017). While some claim women have broken the ‘grass ceiling’ in agriculture (Doering 2013), others are quick to point out that increased involvement has not resulted in equal opportunity (Wright and Annes 2016). In fact, women are more likely to operate smaller farms resulting in less income (Ball 2014; Fremstad and Paul 2020) and less land ownership than men (USDA 2017). Working in an occupation in which the cultural norms value men as more competent can also make women farmers feel excluded (Davies 1996) and struggling to embrace their farmer identity (Peter et al. 2000). The main contribution of this study is to demonstrate the multiple ways through which women farmers navigate the gendered structure of farming and how they either do or undo gender in their daily interactions in this heavily masculinized occupation that has historically constructed the identify of farmers as ‘male’ (Leslie, Wypler, and Bell 2019).

This study utilized qualitative, in-depth interviews to gain insight and perspective into

how women navigate the gendered structure of farming and contributed to the growing literature on doing and undoing gender. Previous research that informed this dissertation focused on women farmers in specific geographical locations (Carter 2017; Haugen 1998; Pilgeram 2007; Shisler and Sbicca 2019; Smyth, Swendener, and Kazyak 2018; Trauger 2004) and neglected to include the perspectives of women of color who farm. My goal was to include more diversity in race/ethnicity, geographical location, and type of farm operation in order to add more nuance and depth to the analysis of the lived experiences of women farmers. I interviewed 32 women who identify as farmers, regardless of type or size of farm operation. Utilizing an invitation on Facebook to participate in this research, I was able to interview women farmers operating in 11 states and the country of Italy. I interviewed 5 Black farmers and 27 white farmers. In this final chapter I summarize the major findings from this study and discuss the theoretical contributions of this dissertation. I then discuss the strengths and limitations of this study and conclude with implications for future research.

#### FARMING EXPERIENCES THAT ARE GENDERED – FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In this study, I used a social structural perspective to explore how women experience the gendered structure of farming. A social structural perspective allowed me to better analyze the ways in which women's and men's gendered behaviors are a result of the unequal and different positions they are assigned to in the social structure, and that structural exclusions are the result of cultural barriers. Risman (2004) argued that gender is embedded throughout social life and considering gender as a social structure allows us to see how one's ability to choose is constrained by the gender structure. My findings focused on the common experiences shared by the women farmers that are embedded in the gendered structure of agriculture at both the micro- and meso-levels, data that I categorized as "farming experiences that are gendered". Three main

findings emerged from the data in this category, including access to capital-related resources, how the women in this study learned to farm, and the women's perception of conventional agriculture as a masculine occupation.

Land, labor, and capital are all requisite for entry into the occupation of farming (Sachs et al. 2016). Women's access to land has long been constrained by economic and social barriers built into the social structure (Jensen 1991). Social and cultural norms of patrilineal heritage common in agricultural families that results in sons inheriting land, not daughters, and economic structures limiting women's ability to earn and borrow money further restricts and constrains women's access to owning land (Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Shortall 2001). Because social and economic factors construct a very limited access structure for women who desire to operate their own farms (Pilgeram and Amos 2015), a woman's typical entry into farming in the U.S. is through marriage (Shortall 2001). Women in this study gained access to their farming occupation in a variety of ways. Many of the women started farming with the financial support of a spouse or life partner, some married in, others are farming with their family (parents and/or siblings), started on their own, inherited their farm operation, or farm as employees for other farmers. For those who began with the financial support of a spouse or life partner, most noted the need for their partner's financial and/or labor support to continue farming and most reported a source of off-farm income helping to support their ongoing farm operation.

Many study participants, particularly those with non-conventional and smaller farming operations, described the ability to access loans through banks or the USDA as a major barrier or constraint to their farming operations. Alpaca and organic vegetable farms, for example, are considered by lenders – private and government – to be risky and therefore funding for these farms' start-up had to be acquired in other ways such as loans from family members or investing

one's lifetime savings, inheritance money, or retirement accounts. Black women farmers discussed that access to USDA programs was problematic due to the way applications, paperwork, and interactions were experienced. While blocked access to conventional lending sources caused by the risk of non-conventional and/or small farm operations is not a gendered barrier per se, this lack of access does affect women more because women are more likely to be operating non-conventional (sustainable and organic) farms (Fremstad and Paul 2020).

None of the women in this study who are farming a conventional operation began on their own. They either married in or are farming with family. Therefore, they did not personally experience a barrier to access to lending because their husband and/or family members had already established a lending relationship with a lender. Not having this relationship and/or not having the capital to qualify for lending are also structural barriers experienced in buying land and starting a farm operation. Conventional operations typically require more start-up capital, including access to more tillable acreage than is needed for non-conventional operations and farm implements not typically needed in smaller operations. As Katherine noted in discussing she and her husband's ability to access lending for their farm operation, "My husband's banked at the same bank his whole life so we have built up a relationship with them...it still matters as to who your family is and where you come from and their history as well, it all plays a part." Blocked access to lending, patriarchal norms whereby men are more likely to inherit farmland, and small-scale diversified operations resulting in less income all result in increased dependence on off-farm income. For the women in this study, the majority of off-farm income came from a significant other – either a spouse or life partner – or their own off-farm employment further perpetuating a cycle of dependence restricting full access to a sustainable farming career.

Most women in this study shared the perspective that women are at a distinct

disadvantage when trying to access capital-related resources including loans and government assistance. Sachs (2018) also found that women struggle to farm or ranch in conventional agriculture due to state policies that support programs and policies that benefit men farmers more than women farmers. It was apparent, however, that the majority of women in this study experienced class privilege via their family history, educational attainment, and overall household income. Based on these findings, future research should focus on two areas: structural barriers to access to conventional and government lending opportunities for small-scale, non-conventional farmers (the majority of whom are women); and comparing the experiences of class advantaged to disadvantaged women farmers (or women who want to become farmers).

Ridgeway (2006) situates gender inequality within the organization of social relations and the process of sex categorization and applies this perspective to any interactions in which gender is salient. We can extend that to the farm and to the sex categorization of men as capable farmers and women as not as capable to address the stereotypes and resulting inequalities and constraints that sex categorization evokes. Learning how to farm was another structural barrier that emerged from the data in this study. Farming is an occupation that requires a very broad skillset that requires a great deal of time to acquire. As Martina aptly pointed out, “The best way to learn is by growing up in it and learning the nuts and bolts of what it takes...” Given the patriarchal structure and sex categorization of farming in the U.S. in which male offspring are more likely than female offspring to inherit the farm and thus acquire years of experience starting in childhood (Sachs 1983), women wanting to farm have to learn in other ways. The main sources of education in farming for the women in this study included internships, the internet, college, reading books, hands-on learning, and conferences. Women in this study who married into farming were most often taught how to farm by their husbands. Structured barriers



in place limiting women's access to the education needed to be successful farmers included, again, the cultural norms of patriarchy on family farms as well as government resources, such as Extension education, organized around and benefitting large-scale, conventional agriculturalists.

The common thread among all of the women in this study in regard to learning what they need to know to be successful farmers was intentionality in their efforts to learn. The time, effort, and financial resources needed to learn what they need to know while at the same time maintaining all other responsibilities is incredible, and also another indicator of privilege that not everyone has equal access to. Women in this study had higher than average levels of educational attainment, and previous studies (Lareau 2002; Reay 2004) have shown a positive association between educational attainment and the acquiring of social and cultural capital. Higher levels of social and cultural capital lead to feelings of empowerment, self-advocacy, and entitlement to a stimulating and rewarding work environment. Also, higher levels of education likely resulted in the knowledge and ability to seek out the education needed to become more successful as farmers. As Kelly stressed, "College gives you the skillset to know how to access farming and other random information." Future research should focus on how women farmers (or women who want to be farmers) with lower levels of educational attainment have learned what they need to know to be farmers or focus on what educational resources are lacking and need to be more available and accessible. Barbercheck et al. (2009), Keirnan et al. (2012), and Trauger et al. (2008) all found that women farmers are voicing frustration that existing educational opportunities are geared toward men and toward larger farm operations and want more opportunities specific to women and to their types of farming operations. While some educational resources have become more available to women, such as WAgNs (Trauger et al. 2008) and Annie's Project (Devlin 2017; Llewellyn 2017), these resources are limited to specific

locations and not widely available throughout the U.S.

A final structural barrier discussed in Chapter 4 is the perspective that farming is a masculine occupation. It is well documented in the literature that the social construct of agriculture as a masculine occupation and the belief that “only men can be farmers” (Rosenfeld 1985:245) is a cultural norm. To expand on previous research that shows that women have traditionally been denied access to spaces of knowledge and authority in agricultural occupations and are frequently unrecognized and ignored the identity as farmers (Shortall 2001), I asked the women in this study several questions to gain their perspective on how they situate themselves in this masculine space. I began by exploring their level of career satisfaction, which was a significant finding in that all of the women in this study reporting being satisfied with their farming career. This is a significant finding because of the positive correlation between job satisfaction and feelings of empowerment and agency (Bock and Shortall 2006). Shisler (2016) found that women who work in agriculture feel empowered in part because of the autonomy they experience, and many of the women in this study remarked that the freedom and autonomy they experience as farmers contributes greatly to their career satisfaction. I also explored what they believed it means to be a farmer and the most offered response was to be a steward, a word synonymous with management and supervision. This implies that many of the women in this sample equate their occupation with someone with authority and power who manages and cares for the land.

All of the women in this study agreed that conventional agriculture is a masculine occupation. The results of this widely-held cultural belief that values men over women in this occupation trickle down and contribute to other barriers previously discussed – access to capital-related resources, education, inheritance, feelings of competence, and identity construction.

However, it was clear to me throughout the data that the women in this study deeply connected with their identity and responsibilities of being a farmer even while aware that the identity most associated with farming is a masculine identity.

One common theme throughout as to why the women believed farming to be a masculine occupation was the relationship between heavy equipment and physical strength. For example, Martina discussed how she did not used to think of herself as a farmer because “if I wasn’t driving the tractor or the combine, to me, that’s what it was...the farmer was the man.” Most of the women in this study did not operate heavy equipment and only one woman interviewed, Mona, felt competent in performing maintenance and repairs on farm machinery.

Mona grew up with a dad and grandpa who included her in all farm operations, including machinery repair and maintenance, from the time she was a young girl, a fact which she attributes to her familiarity and comfort with machinery. The remainder of the women interviewed varied between those who were frustrated that men are considered more capable because they operate the machinery and those who believed men to be more capable because they operate the machinery. Supporting a structuralist perspective, Kanter (1977) argued that an individual’s position in social networks, i.e. the workplace, better explains their behavior than does their internalized femininity or masculinity. The positioning of women farmers in the structure of agriculture that considers men to be the capable operators of machinery and not women may contribute to their perception that they are incapable of being proficient and capable at operating farm equipment and contribute to their reluctance to try. Mona’s example demonstrates that given the opportunity to learn and participate from a young age – one’s early positioning in the social network of farming – is influential in building one’s confidence and competence in machinery operation.

These findings can inform efforts for more accessible educational opportunities for women farmers to enable them to be more knowledgeable about and comfortable with farm equipment. Trying to learn how to operate, maintain, and repair equipment is a daunting challenge but an immeasurably valuable skill set for farmers to have, particularly for those who want to grow their operation to the point where equipment is necessary for efficient management. Given that most men who farm were taught by their fathers how to farm (Sachs 1983) and many women do not have that same experience, women need the opportunity to learn and gain the advantage of handling heavy machinery safely, competently, and without fear or they will continue to be relegated to small farming operations that do not require the use of farm equipment and likely do not provide a sustainable income.

Overall, these findings reiterate the importance of recognizing the mechanisms of how the gendered social structure is producing gender inequality and the gendered barriers that are embedded throughout social life. As Risman (2004) stated, “The social structure is not experienced as oppressive if men and women do not see themselves as similarly situated” (432). Women farmers should be thought of as capable in their occupation as men farmers – if they are both farming, they are similarly situated. We must work to change the cultural narrative that only men can be farmers. If we do not recognize the structural barriers to access that women farmers experience, we do nothing to change them. It is not enough to train individual women farmers to circumvent the barriers they experience to attain success in farming, but rather we must work to change the gendered structure of agriculture by changing policies and programs that disadvantage women farmers and advantage men farmers in order for women to achieve equality in this occupation.

## GENDERED EXPERIENCES IN FARMING – FINDINGS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

I utilized the “doing gender” framework introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987), the “undoing gender” framework introduced by Deutsch (2007), and the “doing difference” framework introduced by West and Fenstermaker (1995) to analyze the data that emphasized gender on an interactional level, findings I categorized as “gendered experiences in farming”. The “doing gender” perspective understands gender as an accomplishment achieved through interaction, and women and men are expected to enact their femininity and masculinity through culturally recognized behaviors and interactions. Women doing gender on the farm has historically meant bringing meals, running errands, and taking care of the family, while men doing gender on the farm has historically ascribed to them the identity of “farmer” and all activities associated with the identity. Women farmers are actively “undoing” gender, or deconstructing gender norms, just by internalizing and embracing the farmer identity and “broadening the notions of what it means to be a woman” (Kelan 2010:187-188). My goal was to dig deeper and learn more about how women farmers embody and enact their agency and farmer identity within the confines of the gender structure and through gendered interactions. Employing the “doing difference” framework allowed me to see how difference is not experienced as singular categories of gender or race or class or sexuality, but as compounded, intersecting categories that connect from a micro level to power relations at the macro level to shape oppression (Collins 1995).

Women in this study experienced gender in differing ways. About half the women in the study were conforming more to gender norms, or “doing gender”, through their interactions and behaviors, and about half were actively resisting gender norms, or “undoing gender” through their interactions and presentations. However, I recognized that doing and undoing gender as

contextual and more of a spectrum of doing and undoing than separate categories of either/or. These findings build on the growing body of “doing gender” literature by demonstrating that the women farmers in this study were not exclusively doing one or the other, but rather navigating across the gender spectrum throughout their daily interactions and responsibilities. Women who were more intentionally “doing gender” by conforming to gender norms in their daily interactions were also “undoing gender” by embracing and enacting the farmer identity. Women who were more intentionally “undoing gender” by resisting feminine-coded behaviors and embracing masculinity in their occupations were also “doing gender” while not engaged in farming in order to stay in touch with who they are as women, or as Katherine noted, “I do work hard at trying to remember I’m a woman (laughter)!”

To pick up on a main point from Chapter 4, gendered barriers are built into the social structure, and women farmers, much like women in other male-dominated occupations, encounter many gendered barriers that men do not experience that restrict women’s full access to their farming careers. The barriers I identified were access to lending, educational opportunities, and full access to their farming identity given the cultural narrative that farming is a masculine occupation. Deutsch (2007) argued that because gender is a social construction it can also be deconstructed through processes of undoing gender. Half the women farmers in this study were undoing gender, or actively resisting feminine-coded behaviors, as they recognized that masculinity is more highly valued in agriculture. The ways in which they resisted the gendered norms included their actions, outward presentation, language, negotiating gender expectations at home and in the wider community, and even arm-wrestling. Pilgeram’s (2007) finding that women farmers felt they must dial down their femininity to display a more masculine image to be considered competent and successful in their occupation aligns with the data in this study for

the farmers who were undoing gender.

I was able to answer a main question addressed in this study, thus contributing to the “doing and undoing gender” literature as it connects with structural perspectives. The question was “Are women farmers doing femininity in new ways in farming or being more like men because masculinity is more highly valued?” I concluded that women farmers engaged in enactments of “undoing gender” are transforming their own behaviors to align with existing norms, or being more like men because masculinity is more highly valued in agriculture.

Therefore, I argue that even through undoing gender, the gender structure is not being dismantled but merely rearranged in that the women undoing gender are doing so to fit into the masculine structure of farming, not finding new ways to be women. As such, undoing gender to fit into the masculine landscape is not diminishing male privilege but rather reinforcing it. Conversely, then, the question to be addressed in future research is, Will women farmers who are “doing gender” (enacting feminine norms and expectations) in such a way that is recognized by others as challenging the existing masculine norms in agriculture be more effective in dismantling the gender structure? Women have always been farmers but have not until recently begun embracing and enacting the farmer identity. Will more women enacting their personal agency and identity as women *and* farmers bring effective change to the cultural norm of agriculture as a masculine occupation?

Analyzing the data in this study from an intersectional perspective, or what West and Fenstermaker (1995) termed “doing difference”, showed that race was taken for granted by many of the white farmers in this study. A few white farmers acknowledged their whiteness as a privilege, especially in rural communities, but most answered in a way that did not recognize race. It was evident that Black farmers in this study all experienced gender in a way that

intersected and interacted with their race. Each of the Black farmers interviewed shared narratives of discrimination and differential treatment, including negative treatment from others, boundary and land disputes, sexualization, and discrimination at livestock auctions. Additionally, Jeanette, a study participant who identified as lesbian, shared how she felt treated differently as a lesbian farmer in a heteronormative culture. The existing research on women farmers is nearly absent the voices of homosexual women and women of color. Each of their stories is important because we will never know the true experiences of women farmers until we know the experiences of *all* women farmers. Future research should be intentionally intersectional and draw out the differences experienced by all women, not just those in the majority: white, heterosexual, well-educated, married women (Pilgeram 2019).

#### STUDY STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This study contributes to the growing literature on the gendered experiences of women farmers. I utilized in-depth qualitative interviews to learn more about these women's perceptions of how they navigate the gendered structure of farming. In-depth qualitative interviews allowed for more nuance and understanding of their positionalities and experiences. Strengths of qualitative research are the focus on aspects of reality that cannot be quantified and the ability to better understand the complex realities of a given context, in this case women who farm. I was able to interview women from 11 states and the country of Italy which allowed a more widespread variety of experiences to be shared. My sample included 5 Black women and 27 white women. Existing literature has all but neglected to include the perspectives of Black women farmers and this study was able to share their lived experiences that demonstrated how gender and race intersect and interact and result in much different interactions than those shared by white women farmers. I discussed multiple ways in which the gendered structure of farming



has created barriers to access for women farmers. I was able to contribute to the growing “doing and undoing” gender literature by showing that the women in this study were not exclusively “doing” or “undoing” gender, but rather that “doing gender” was more of a context-dependent spectrum or continuum of interaction. I contributed to the growing “doing difference” literature by demonstrating the differences in experiences of white and Black women farmers, as well as discussing the difference in interactions experienced by a lesbian woman farmer. This contribution highlights the importance of diversity and intersectionality in research so that the findings are more representative of all persons in the research population.

Some inherent limitations apply to this qualitative study. The research sample was a small, purposefully selected sample utilizing a solicitation for participation on Facebook women in agriculture groups and therefore the generalizability of the data is limited. Also, because participation in this study was voluntary, the sample may not be representative of all women farmers because self-selection may have resulted in bias. It is possible that women farmers who are on Facebook groups and willing to be interviewed for a study about the gender experiences of women farmers are not representative of all women farmers. Another limitation to this study is the over-representation of women who have attained higher than average levels of education and operate from a position of class privilege. Higher levels of education and class privilege are instrumental in acquiring social and cultural capital, both of which are associated with higher self-assurance, confidence, and entitlement in their interactions with others. It was evident that the women in this study experienced privilege that many other women farmers, or women wanting to be farmers, do not experience. Even though the women in this study shared narratives of barriers to accessing many resources, they were able to circumvent those barriers due to their social and cultural capital to utilize alternative resources including family land, loans from

family, and educational opportunities. These alternative resources are likely not available to women who do not share a similar level of class advantage and who do not have similar levels of social and cultural capital. The over-representation of women with higher educational attainment could be a result of my recruitment method of utilizing women in agriculture Facebook group solicitations. This recruitment method was a strength in that I was able to hear from women in many geographical locations throughout the US, representing a wide variety of farm operations, but it potentially limited the inclusion of women with lower educational levels and social class.

## CONCLUSION

“I think [women farmers] are very, very intelligent and more highly skilled than ever...I think the future is bright for women in agriculture.” (Cynthia, alfalfa farmer in Arizona)

At the conclusion of each interview, I asked each participant to share what she felt is important for me to know about women farmers. The responses were all over the place, from “We need more of a voice” to “You can do it just as good as a guy can.” And as Cynthia (quoted above) stated, the future is bright. What was evident in every response was these women’s strength, optimism, agency, and confidence in who they are as farmers, and their excitement in sharing that with others. They love being farmers and they want other women who want to farm to have the chance to try it too. But most acknowledged that the gendered barriers for women are real and still exist, and until the structure of agriculture changes to see women farmers as equal and as competent as men farmers, the barriers will remain. I believe Martina summed it up quite well: “One of the first things I began to realize [in my career as an ag industry leader] is how even if somebody’s ‘at’ the table they can still not be ‘at’ the table. We can invite women or minorities to come be at the table, but once they’re there are they taken seriously?”

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## APPENDIX A

### FACEBOOK SOLICITATION SCRIPT

HSC Protocol Number: 19208

Facebook solicitation script for recruiting participants on Facebook group pages Women Who Farm, Women in Agriculture, and FarmHer:

Attention women farmers! My name is Rebecca and I am a fellow woman farmer who is also working on my PhD in Sociology at SIU Carbondale. I am studying women farmers for my dissertation research project and I am looking for volunteer research participants! The title of my project is: "How are women farmers 'doing' and 'undoing' gender? An exploration of women's gender practices in farming". If you would be interested in sharing with me your experiences as a woman farmer in a nontraditional occupation, or have questions about the study, please PM for more information! To participate you must be at least 18 years of age! Your participation would include an interview with me, either face-to-face or via electronic communication (depending on where you live). That's it...no other strings attached! Thank you in advance for considering, and if you know of someone who might be interested and won't see this on Facebook, I'd greatly appreciate you passing this info along! (Please note: This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. Email: [siuhsc@siu.edu](mailto:siuhsc@siu.edu).)

APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in this research project conducted by Rebecca J. Tuxhorn, a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Southern Illinois University.

Name of Principle Investigator: Rebecca J. Tuxhorn, PhD Student

Name of Organization: Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Name of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Chris Wienke, Sociology Associate Professor, SIUC

Name of Project: How are women farmers 'doing' and 'undoing' gender?: An exploration of women's gender practices in farming

### **Part I: Information Sheet**

#### **Introduction**

My name is Rebecca Tuxhorn, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Southern Illinois University. I am completing the requirements for a doctorate in Sociology and studying women farmers for my dissertation. I am inviting you to be a part of this research as a woman currently engaged in the occupation of farming. Before you decide whether or not you would like to be a participant, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research.

#### **Purpose of the research**

I understand the purpose of this study is to learn more about women farmers to better understand their overall experience as a farmer, how they may be 'doing' or 'undoing' gender as a woman farmer, and how they navigate the gender structure of farming.

#### **Type of Research Intervention**

This research will involve your participation in an audio-recorded face-to-face or electronic communication (i.e. Skype or Facetime) interview with me. Please note that Skype is not an encrypted site. I will record our interview and take notes while we talk so that I can write about what you have to say at a later time. This interview should take about one hour.

#### **Participant Selection**

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a woman currently engaged in the occupation of farming. All participants must be 18 years and older to take part in this study.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you agree to participate and later change your mind, you may withdraw from participating at any time.

#### **Procedures**

I will audio-record our interview so that I can easily retrieve this information to be included in my research paper. Your name will not be included on this recording. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except myself will have access to the recording. Participants

should NOT mention the names of any non-participants during the interview as I do not want to compromise the privacy of any non-participant in this study. The recording will be transferred from my audio recorder to my computer, which is password-protected with only myself knowing the password. I will destroy this recording as soon as it is transferred to the computer. After transcribing the interview, the audio recording will be deleted from my computer. The transcribed interview will be kept as a Word document on my password-protected computer. Any printouts of the interviews will be kept in a locked storage cabinet at Southern Illinois University.

### **Risks**

I am asking you to share with me some potentially personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the things I will ask about. You do not have to answer any question and may stop the interview at any time if you want to do so. You do not have to give me any reason for not responding to any question or for stopping the interview. To protect your identity, all data in my final research will be reported in aggregate so that no one person can be identified separately.

### **Benefits**

This research will not result in any direct benefit to you. Your participation is appreciated and will assist in developing my full dissertation project researching women farmers.

### **Reimbursements**

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in this research.

### **Who to Contact:**

I understand questions or concerns about this study are to be directed to Rebecca Tuxhorn, 217/820-1404, rebecca.tuxhorn@siu.edu, or her advisor, Dr. Chris Wienke, SIU Department of Sociology, 618/ 453-7629, cwienke@siu.edu.

### **Signature of Consent:**

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity and know my responses will be audio recorded. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers.

“I agree \_\_\_\_\_ I disagree \_\_\_\_\_ to have my responses recorded on audio tape.”

“I agree \_\_\_\_\_ I disagree \_\_\_\_\_ that Rebecca Tuxhorn may quote me in her paper.”

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Participant Signature

Date

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Compliance, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4344. Phone (618) 453-4533. Email: siuhsc@siu.edu.

APPENDIX C  
INFORMATION SHEET

Information Sheet:

Before we begin our interview, please complete the following information about yourself:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital status: \_\_\_\_\_

Sexual identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have children? Y N If yes, ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_

If you do have children, do they live at home with you? Y N

Are you currently in the military or a veteran? Y/N

- If yes, which branch of the military? \_\_\_\_\_

Highest level of education achieved: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's highest level of education achieved: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have off-farm employment? Y N If yes, what is your off-farm employment?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Household annual income (including all sources of income):

< \$10,000

\$10,000 - \$40,000

\$40,001 - \$80,000

\$80,001 - \$120,000

\$120,001 - \$140,000

\$140,001 - \$160,000

\$160,001 - \$180,000

\$180,001 - \$200,000

\$200,001 - \$250,000

> \$250,001

## APPENDIX D

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions Guideline for Women Farmers Dissertation Research:

*I'm going to begin by asking questions about your history in farming:*

How long have you been farming? When did you start to think of yourself as a farmer?

Are you an owner/operator? Do you have a partner or partners?

What type of operation do you farm?

- Crops
- Approximate acreage
- Livestock

What do you think it means to be a 'farmer'?

What motivated your choice of farming as a career?

***Probe for stories – probe for stories with dad***

How satisfied are you with your farming career?

How have you learned what you need to know to farm?

Do you feel like you have had the education you need to be successful in farming? Why or why not?

Have you experienced any barriers to entry into farming related to capital, such as land cost or equipment or buildings, etc..? (Explain)

Do you have anyone that you discuss farming with on a regular basis? (A mentor or mentors for example) If so, do you feel having this mentoring relationship contributes to your success as a farmer? Why or why not?

Do you feel accepted in the farming community? (Explain)

What do you like best about farming? What do you like least about farming?

*Now I'm going to focus a little more on gender and how you may experience gender in your everyday experiences.*

Do you agree or disagree that conventional agriculture and farming is considered to be a masculine occupation? Why?

Are there ways in which you feel you are treated differently because you are a female in a male-dominated occupation?

Have you ever been harassed because you are a woman farmer?

Have you ever had to remind the people that you deal with on a daily basis in your occupation that you are a farmer? (Expand – if so, generally which people, how does this interaction look, do you think it is because you are a woman)

Can you tell me about a time when you felt discriminated against?

(If she is in a partnership with a man or men, ask the following): Is there a division of labor on your farm so that you do certain tasks and the men on the farm do certain tasks, or do you both (all) work together and each of you do everything that needs to be done? If there is a division of labor, what does that look like? (Who does which tasks? Does she feel like some tasks are more for men and some more for women?) Are you all equally important to the farm operation?

Would you consider yourself to be more masculine or more feminine? (Explore here – as compared to whom? Other farmers? Other non-farmers?) What does it mean to be masculine? What does it mean to be feminine?

Do you feel like you have to act more masculine when you're actively farming than when you are not?

Do you feel like others judge you as to how masculine or feminine you are as a farmer?

Do you feel like you have to dress a certain way to be more masculine or more feminine when you are farming? What about when you aren't farming?

Do you feel like men farmers are more competent at some tasks than women farmers? Are women farmers more competent at some tasks than men farmers?

Do female farmers have the same access as male farmers to capital-related resources for farming? (i.e. loans, programs, education, conferences, etc...)

A previous researcher studying women farmers noted that when women farmers appear feminine, their abilities as farmers are questioned. But when women farmers appear masculine, their abilities as women are questioned. Would you agree or disagree with this statement? (Explain)

(If her farm is part of a family operation, discuss the following): Have you experienced any difference in treatment from your family as a woman farmer compared to the men in your family who farm?

*For interviewees who have children:*

How do you navigate your responsibilities as a farmer and your responsibilities as a mother? What challenges do you face as a farmer who is also a mom? (Or a mom who is also a farmer?)

Is childcare ever an issue?

Do you and your partner (husband/father of child/ren) equally share childcare responsibilities?

*Bringing interview around to issues of race:*

As a white/black/Hispanic woman, are there any race-specific barriers or challenges you experience as a farmer?

Can you tell me about any experiences you've had where you felt like your race was an issue in your access to farming?

*In closing:*

What do you feel is important for me to know about women farmers?

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Lincoln Land Community College  
Associate of Arts, Pre-Law, December 2000

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How Are Women Farmers “Doing” and “Undoing” Gender?: An Exploration of Women’s  
Gender Practices in Farming

Major Professor: Dr. Christopher Wienke

Publications:

Tuxhorn, Rebecca. 2021. ““I’ve Got Something to Live for Now”: A Study of Prison Nursery  
Mothers.” *Critical Criminology* (in press).

Tuxhorn, Rebecca. 2020. Book Review of “Herlands: Exploring the Women’s Land Movement  
in the United States” by Keridwen N. Luis. *Rural Sociology*, 85(1).