FARM WOMEN:

DRIVING TRACTORS AND NEGOTIATING GENDER

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Background

A social constructionist approach to gender identity formation, derived from a feminist post-structural perspective, invites explorations of the many and varied contexts in which masculinities and femininities are constituted. One such context is the workplace. Because work has been found to be a key site for the enactment and affirmation of gender (e.g. Pringle 1988; Hopton 1999), sociologists have been particularly interested in what occurs when men and women undertake work that is considered atypical for their gender.

Of particular importance in this regard has been Williams' (1989) seminal study of male nurses and female military officers. In observing these employees Williams (1989:6) noted a gender redefinition occurring in work roles, tasks and identities. That is, male nurses asserted their masculine identities as workers by giving emphasis to aspects of the occupational role traditionally associated with masculinities while minimizing aspects of the role traditionally associated with femininities. The opposite occurred with the female officers. Subsequent work on men and women involved in non-traditional labour has demonstrated the veracity of Williams' (1989) findings. Yodanis (2000), for example, examined the way in which fishing women justify their involvement in work typically undertaken by men by emphasizing that this is an extension of their roles as wives and mothers. They rely on highlighting their traditional domestic role to legitimize their participation in work which has been typically reserved for men. Alternatively, Rouston and Mills (2000) note the masculinizing strategies of male music teachers. These involve distancing themselves from feminized aspects of the role and emphasizing in their teaching style, dress and involvement in extra-curricula activities, aspects of hegemonic masculinity. They therefore retain their sense of masculine identity while working in what is numerically a female dominated profession. Similar masculinizing strategies are utilized by male temporary clerical workers (Henson and Krasas-Rogers 2001) and males working in creative industries (Alvesson 1998).

While scholars have focused on a wide range of work-contexts in investigating men and women's involvement in non-traditional labour, of interest to this paper is the constitution of gendered identities on the family farm and the occupational role of farmer. The particular focus is the question of how women construct feminine subject positions when engaging in an on-farm physical work role which is traditionally defined as masculine.

Typically, farm women engage in a multiple array of tasks including domestic work, go-fering, financial management and information gathering (Sachs 1996). However, on-farm physical work is typically viewed as the domain of men (Alston 1995). In undertaking on-farm physical work then, women have crossed the traditional gender division of labor. These women have seemingly further disrupted the gender order in that they are not just involved in on-farm physical labor, but physical labor involving the use of large machinery. This is critical because, as Strategaki (1988:256) comments, within the farming enterprise machines are "the main criterion" for differentiating work that is designated male and female. Examples from a range of agricultural sectors such as poultry farming and dairy farming have demonstrated that as aspects of work on a farm become mechanized, they shift from

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being “women's work” to “men's work” (Shortall 2000). Thus, those women who undertake on-farm physical roles deemed to be men's work and engage in those tasks associated with the occupational role of farmer represent a significant deviation from the norm. They are the metaphorical “travelers” (Marshall 1984) in the “foreign country” (Follo 2002), in ways similar to their female counterparts also engaging in male-dominated work places and in work associated with the construction of masculinities. Therefore, how gendered identities are constituted, and furthermore, how they are negotiated in this work environment, is of particular sociological interest.

In embarking on such an investigation I am seeking to make particular comparisons with a Norwegian study undertaken by Brandth (1994). While the author’s focus in this case was on seven women who farmed in their own right, rather than women who farmed alongside their partners, her research question resonates strongly with my own. That is: “How do they (women who use heavy agricultural machinery) create themselves as women, when they are breaking the gendered division of labor by doing the same work as male farmers?” (Brandth 1994:128). In setting the theoretical context, Brandth (1994) highlights that the gender system rests on the accentuation of differences between masculinity and femininity and the subordination of femininity to masculinity. She thus asks what might happen to these tenets of gender when women enter arenas of work traditionally done by men. What is revealed from the focus group data with the women participants is that the negotiation of gender for women farmers is complex, contradictory and complex. Important to the women legitimately asserting their identity as farmer is associating themselves with men who farm and distancing themselves from women who do not. Brandth (1994) notes the way in which the women articulate this position by identifying closely with their farmer fathers and distancing themselves from their mothers and their mothers’ focus on housework. The formation of the women farmers’ gendered identities is, however, not straightforward, because while they seek to demonstrate their competence in farming they risk exclusion and derision if their femininity is seen to be overly compromised. This necessitates enacting the types of gender management strategies noted in other studies of women and men involved in non-traditional work. These strategies operate to reaffirm the women’s feminine identities as well as protect and enhance their husbands’ masculine identities. In concluding her study, Brandth (1994) acknowledges the emergence of a “new” feminine subjectivity in the agricultural arena, as a “woman farmer”. However, it is constructed in a way which maintains not just a separation between masculinity and femininity, but a gendered hierarchy between them.

Given the significant and ongoing shifts that have occurred in societal gender discourses over the past decade Brandth’s (1994) examination of women’s on-farm subjectivities requires revisiting. My concern in this paper is to explore whether, in this different historical period and cultural context, the gender order remains intact, or, in contrast, has been disrupted by the constitution of new discourses of femininity which unconditionally validate a woman’s competent use of agricultural machinery. While my focus is on the Australian sugar industry the paper’s discussion of gendered identities is not situated within a national context. Instead, the discussion of the formation and articulation of masculinities and femininities is grounded in the literature on gender and farming in western nations. This broader contextual focus is in keeping with past studies of gender and agriculture (e.g. Brandth 1994; Liepins 1996; 1998). It also reflects the fact that remarkable similarities have been found in the gendered discourses of agriculture across western nations (e.g. see Brandth,and Haugen 2000 and Liepins 2000).

Theoretical Framework

As stated, this paper engages a feminist post-structural framework to examine what West and Zimmerman (1987) called, in their much-cited paper, “doing gender”. As such, it relies on three theoretical concepts which are outlined below.

The first concerns the fact that, as Judith Butler (1990:24) succinctly states, “gender is not a noun”. Gender is distinct from biological sex in that there is nothing pre-determined, natural or essential about one's gender identity. Rather, gender identity is produced or constituted through discourse, which is defined by Alvesson and Due Billing (1997:40) as “a set of statements, beliefs and vocabularies that is historically and socially specific and that tends to produce truth effects”. This is exemplified in the literature on women and farming in research undertaken by Liepins (1996;1998). In this work, the author studied the agricultural media as a discourse and identified the ways in which it shapes the construction of farming as requiring masculine strength, control and action. Within this discourse men and masculinities are privileged and women and femininities are marginalized, thus creating the belief that it is men who are farmers and the perception that women contribute little, if anything, to agriculture. An understanding of gender as discursively constituted is not meant to deny the importance of the material or the practical for as Probyn (1996, p. 146) reminds us, in drawing on Foucault, there is a need to “wake up to the heavy materiality of discourse”. The gender discourses connecting men and farming, have, for example, afforded men a range of greater material opportunities including an increased ability to access agricultural training, obtain credit to farm, achieve positions of agricultural leadership and inherit land (Leckie 1993; Sachs 1996; Shortall 1999; Pini 2004c).

The second point of theoretical significance to this paper is that gender identities are not singular, but multiple and varied. Thus, there is no homogeneous femininity (McRobbie 1996; Liladhar 2000). At the same time there are particular constructions of femininity within certain contexts that are dominant or normative (Bartky 1990). For example, feminist rural sociologists have argued that within rural communities, feminine identities focused on a domestic role are particularly valorized (Little and Austin 1996; Hughes 1997). This is not to suggest that “farm women” or “rural women” are fixed subjects conforming to a universal gendered identity, but within the discursive fields which make up the rural and farming sectors there is a hegemonic notion of femininity which emphasizes women's appropriate place as being within the home (Little 1997a; 1997b). This assists in explaining why the women involved in tractor work described in this study seek strategies to “manage their feminine identities”. This is because they experience potential dissonance in constituting their gendered identities as feminine while undertaking work outside their traditional sphere.

The final theoretical construct relevant to this paper is that of agency. That is, feminist post-structuralists emphasize that while discourses may be limited to them, women have the capacity to position themselves within discourses, choose from discursive positionings or indeed resist and create new discourses (Weedon 1987). The capacity of rural women to do just this has been well articulated by Mackenzie (1992; 1994) in examining documents from the Ontario Farm Women’s Network (OFWN). In this work, the author demonstrates that through new rural women's groups, farm women are reconstructing notions of “farmer” and “farming”. The so-called reverse discourses being produced by these women’s groups represent a considerable challenge to the masculinized notion of farmer dominant in mainstream agricultural discourse. In a different study, Oldrup (1999:356) also emphasizes the importance of the concept of agency arguing that the Danish farm women in her study are “actively and creatively” engaged in identity construction as they undertake new roles off-farm.

In summary, farm women are presented in this paper as agentic subjects actively constructing their gendered identities from a range of discursive positions available to them. How knowledge about these farm women was obtained and produced is outlined below.

Methodology

This paper is based on a doctoral study which examined women's contributions to the Australian sugar industry. The study was undertaken in partnership with the agri-political group, CANEGROWERS,

which represents the interests of the 6000 cane farming families in the Australian state of Queensland. The organization was established over seventy-five years' ago as a representative group for sugar cane farmers. Its current structure, established under the original 1926 legislation which formalised the agri-political group's existence, involves a three level structure of elected leadership. The elected membership of the organization is supported by a staff of one hundred located in nineteen district offices throughout the state of Queensland as well as a head office in the state capital of Brisbane.

CANEGROWERS' interest in the research was motivated by the concern that women held none of the 181 positions of elected leadership in the organization. Thus, the research examined why women were not represented in industry leadership as well as potential strategies for change. To address this question it was necessary to examine firstly women's on-farm roles and identities. It is this, specifically in relation to on-farm physical work, which is reported in the following sections of the paper.

In total, eighty women participated in sixteen initial and follow-up focus groups of two hours' duration in two different cane growing case study sites. These case study sites were purposively chosen (Miles and Hubermann 1994) as women's industry networks had been established in both districts. This was not the case in any other cane growing districts. The existence of these women's groups therefore marked these districts as unique. As the research focused on examining potential strategies to facilitate equity the networks were important to examine in detail. The case study sites were thus selected on the basis that they could potentially contribute to theory development (Mason 2002).

Participants were selected according to the principles of theoretical sampling described in the qualitative methodological literature (Gray 2004:324-236). Given the large number of women who could be involved in the focus groups, it was decided to select participants who had demonstrated some willingness to participate in industry forums and politics. CANEGROWERS' staff provided assistance with this process. Over half of the eighty participants involved in the focus groups (n=43) had grown up on a cane farm, but just two had inherited farms. Instead, the majority farmed (n=53) in partnership with their husband's extended family. Most were married (n=69) and a small number widowed (n= 10). Given that the women were all involved in the same industry there was a degree of homogeneity in social class amongst the women involved in the focus group. There was as well a degree of sameness in the age profile of the women involved in the research. While I did not specifically ask women their ages in the focus groups it was apparent that most were over forty. Six women identified themselves as being under forty. A further commonality amongst the women was the fact that almost all took full responsibility for domestic labour (n=74) and the financial management of the farm (n=70). A small group was also involved in off-farm paid work (n=10).

Focus groups began with women introducing themselves. Participants described their backgrounds and how they came to be involved in the sugar industry before moving on to outline the types of roles they undertake on the farm. In the second half of the focus groups discussion moved to women's involvement in the agri-political group, CANEGROWERS. Participants were asked to reflect on women's low level of participation in the producer group as well as to recount their experiences as members of the women's network. Elsewhere I have described the focus group methodology engaged in this study in more detail, and in particular, explained the rich data that emerged from these encounters as women questioned, confirmed and debated the issues (Pini 2002).

Further informing focus group findings was data obtained through descriptive, analytical and reflective journal comments I made as a participant observer during three visits to each of the case study locations (see Pini 2003a; 2004b). Participant observation was undertaken at the local CANEGROWERS' offices , at local CANEGROWERS' meetings and at meetings of the women's networks. I recorded all my observations as a participant observer in a research journal using, firstly, the

questions from the survey instrument as a preliminary guideline for categories of recording data, but extending the categories as the research progressed. In recording observations I was both 'descriptive and analytical' (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, p.47) and included my 'own feelings and reactions' to events and situations (Patton 1990, p.239). All of this data – focus groups and participant observations were analyzed thematically using the qualitative software package Nvivo (Qualitative Solutions and Research 1999).

Cane farming women's involvement in tractor work

Women on Australian cane farms are not typically involved in the highly mechanized on-farm work that is characteristic of the industry. Of the eighty women who participated in focus groups, thirty-nine undertook no on-farm physical work involving tractors and heavy machinery. A further thirty were engaged in a limited amount of on-farm physical work involving tractors and heavy machinery. Only eleven women undertook almost all on-farm physical work involving tractors and heavy machinery. This paper is consequently focused on a small sample, and the findings should be read with this in mind. At the same time, the sample is sociologically significant for women who undertake on-farm tractor work are different and deviant from the norm and they consequently may provide new insights into gender relations and farming (see for example, Pini 2003b).

It could be assumed that the capital intensive natural of sugar cane would facilitate women's involvement as physical strength is not an issue. However, this view fails to acknowledge the close connection between men, masculinities and technologies (see Mellstrom 2004; Faulkner 2001; Wajcman 1991; 2004), or the more specific connection between masculinities and machines that has been documented in the literature on gender and farming (e.g. Brandth 1995; Saugers 2002). The vast majority of women in this study were not involved in tractor work or involved in only a limited amount of tractor work. Through excluding themselves from this work they protect and reinforce the masculine subjectivities of their farmer husbands as well as their own feminine subjectivities. Men can construct themselves as physically active, robust, instrumental and technologically competent as they have a monopoly on tractor work. Because women do not typically do this work, men's claim to a masculine identity and the traits and characteristics associated with this identity are legitimised and strengthened. Further, women who do no tractor work are, by definition, not masculine. They are soft, illogical and mechanically and technologically unskilled.

What though of the women who did engage in this work? Like the women described by Brandth (1994) the cane farming women who did engage in tractor work engaged a range of "gender management" strategies by which they sought to both undertake a masculine role and retain their femininity. Five different strategies have been identified from the data. Of these, two are equivalent to those described by Brandth (1994) while two are variants of those described by Brandth (1994). One final strategy that appears to be the most widely used by cane farming women is distinctly different. Each of the strategies is discussed below.

Common gender management strategies

The first strategy used by women involved in tractor work as a means of negotiating their gendered identity was simply to minimize or even hide their on-farm contributions. For example, in one group two women explained that while they had been engaged in tractor work since the early years of their marriages over twenty years ago, they needed to keep it hidden from the public. One said that when she first started she was "allowed to work on the farm, but only out the back" so that she would not be seen. The women said that opposition came from their brothers-in-law and fathers-in-law with whom they were then working in partnership. Remembering the initial interaction with her in-laws about her on-

farm involvement, the second woman reflected that her offer of "giving a hand" was met with the comment, "I don't bloody think so". In engaging this practice these two cane farming women acted in a way consistent with the Norwegian women in Brandth's (1994) study. The fact that these cane farming participants use an equivalent explanation for such a strategy reveals that there may be little transformation in the way in which masculine identities are constructed in farming communities. Both groups the Australian and Norwegian women farmers sought to minimize or hide their involvement as a means of ensuring husbands would not be labeled lazy or inefficient for relying on female labor. For the cane farming women what is apparent is that masculinity is policed and monitored as strongly today as it was a decade previously, and further, that there has been little unsettling of the strong connection between tractor work and hegemonic discourses of masculinity.

The second strategy engaged by the cane farming women involved in tractor work to assert their gendered subject positions was to emphasize the importance of their domestic and household role. This too was a commonly used strategy of the women in Brandth's (1994) study. Domestic work is a role which almost all of the eighty women in the focus groups said they were primarily responsible for undertaking. It is clearly then a role which is considered to be exclusively female. When describing their on-farm tractor work-roles, it was typical for women to return to the issue of domestic duties to remind participants as well as myself that this was their first priority. One explained that neither she nor her husband bothered what people thought about her involvement on-farm as "long as I get all the housework done". Others told stories of how they managed to "keep the house clean" and "get the jobs done" while undertaking their on-farm tractor labor. This was, for one participant a matter of "getting sent home from the paddock at six, half an hour early" to prepare the evening meal, while for another it was a matter of washing clothes before she went to the paddock in the morning, taking them off the line at lunchtime and folding them at night. Given the inextricable connection between domestic duties and hegemonic femininity, it is not surprising that these women emphasized the importance of a household role to emphasize their gendered identity. While these women may have trespassed into a domain of masculinity by undertaking tractor work, they could define a clear boundary between themselves and men through their focus on domestic duties.

A third strategy used by the eleven women to negotiate their identity as feminine while undertaking work deemed masculine involved distancing themselves from men who also worked on the farm or other male farmers, as well as from the men's performance of masculinities. In Brandth's (1994) study women achieved this by leaving the task of repairing and maintaining equipment for men. In this study, women reported other ways of creating a gendered boundary marker. For example, one woman described consciously and deliberately setting herself apart physically and conversationally from the men to accomplish this objective. Commenting on how she conducted herself when working on the farm with a group made up solely of men, she said, "I never tried to be part of them. In lunch times I never sit with them. I never try to be one of the boys. I keep my place." This participant may have been considered by some to be "less" feminine because she did the same tractor work as men, but because she separated herself in this way, she was still "different" from them. This strategy of separating oneself from the masculinities pervading the on-farm context was also evident in the stories two women told about swearing in the paddock. These women said they insisted on no swearing when they were working on the tractors with the men. One explained, "If men do swear, I would say to them that's $10 a swear word and add it up and say that they owe me $60 or whatever. They would get the message and you never had no more hassles." A further way in which women distanced themselves from the masculinized space of on-farm tractor work was by minimizing the degree of strength and expertise required to use large machinery. One commented that "the new six tonne bins are a lot easier to fill" and another said that driving the harvester was the "best job", as the cabin was air-conditioned and so

she ended the day "cool and clean", unlike the men driving the tractors which are used to take the cane to the mills.

The fourth way in which women involved in tractor work negotiated their femininity concerned how they presented themselves when they entered the public domain. This differs in a slight but interesting way from the strategy engaged by Brandth's (1994) women, who emphasized their femininity through focusing on how they, as wives, presented the male bodies of their husbands. For the Norwegian farm women, the public display of their husband's well clothed, washed and ironed appearance affirms the feminine subjectivities as "good" wives. The cane farming women, in contrast, gave emphasis to their own embodiment in terms of normative definitions of femininity. They described always being "lady-like in what they said" or "acting like a lady" in their dealings with people. Further to this were descriptions of the use of dress to emphasize feminine identities. It is a sentiment expressed by one of the participants who said that women like her who were involved in on-farm physical work "always go out dressed up and we look as good as any other women so it doesn't really degrade us doing physical work". Another participant, Janet, commented that she too always "got dressed up to go to town". She felt the other women in the area "were funny about" her on-farm physical work but was unable to say "Why or how or put my finger on it. Just that you knew you'd crossed the boundary." While Janet may have been viewed as crossing this unseen but powerful gender boundary in terms of her work as a harvester driver, her attention to dress and speech when "in town" provided another boundary for her to mark herself as feminine. Like the other women, she engaged "ladylike" dress and speech as important symbolic indicators to reinforce a feminine identity which had been otherwise compromised through involvement in on-farm physical work.

A 'new' strategy for managing gender

Gender management strategies engaged by men and women in non-traditional occupations are not static. They are historically, culturally and socially specific and changing (Kvande 1999; Lupton 2000; Pini 2005). This is evident in that the strategies outlined above appear to be far less important to the cane farming women than a "new" strategy they described. This is a strategy that is quite distinct from any of those identified by Brandth (1994). For example, women who volunteered that they had attempted to hide their tractor work when first married said this was no longer the case. Instead, they said this "no longer mattered". Similarly, those like Janet who explained the importance of emphasizing their femininity when interacting outside the farm-gate also stated that this was not really "that important". This shift is related to the adoption of a new strategy to negotiate on-farm physical work and one's feminine identities. This strategy is the adoption of a farm as business discourse. Women had been exposed to this discourse through government and agri-political leaders who, as one said, "Are always telling us we're business people not farmers". It is a discourse clearly articulated by one participant in explaining why she was not bothered about people questioning her femininity because of her involvement in tractor work. She said: "I know some women have a problem with doing farm work because they think it's unfeminine, but those I know don't. They see it (engaging in farm work) as the survival of the family farm and they put it (femininity) in second place."

Those women who drew on the farm as business discourse emphasized the farm as being a partnership between husband and wife. This partnership requires both members to contribute if it is to be successful. Again, however, the emphasis was on partnership in terms of a business enterprise. Thus, one stated, "I have a great husband who's very supportive and we're working together. I'm working with him in the industry, the business, and we look at it that I'm doing my bit for our business. It's a joint effort."

The women involved in tractor work provided evidence of invoking this discursive construction of their work and occupational role to counter a range of negative comments. One participant, Louise, for example, told the story of being visited on her farm by the local Australian Workers' Union (AWU) representative who castigated her for carting cane when she was, in his view, “taking a man's job”. She replied to him, as she said she has to others who have made negative comments to her about “the work being unfeminine”, that this was of lesser importance compared to “the need to make the business work”. In another case, a participant reflected on criticisms of her tractor work saying, “I’ve heard funny things, but that goes over my head. This is your business and you look after it.” Two others in this focus group also involved in on-farm physical work agreed saying, “We’re just women looking after our businesses.”

The farm as business discourse has become the favored means by which women involved in on-farm physical work negotiate involvement in a role deemed masculine and retain a feminine identity. Engaging this discourse is quite distinct from the other strategies used by women involved in tractor work because it does not rely on enhancing aspects of one’s feminine identity. It also actually renames the gender specific roles of “farmer” and “farm wife” as either “managers”, “partners”, or “business owners”. This is significant because while rural sociologists have described different shifts in agricultural identities throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, the construction of farming as a masculine endeavor has proved highly resilient (e.g. Liepins 1996; 1998; Teather 1998).

Conclusions

This paper has described the gender management strategies engaged by farm women who undertake the masculine practice of tractor work. As Brandth (1994) found, what is important about these strategies is that they offer little or no significant challenge to the gendered construction of farming as a male enterprise. In fact, they reinforce and sustain such a construction. This apparent anomaly can be explained by examining other studies which have considered the construction of gendered identities by men and women engaged in work which is considered atypical for their gender.

That is, the women involved in tractor work in the sugar industry, like the fishing women (Yodanis 2000), male music teachers (Rouston and Mills 2000), clerical assistants (Henson and Krasas-Rogers 2001) and creative workers (Alvesson 1998) have fashioned a new gendered identity. They are not the recognizable and traditional “farm wives” whose definition of femininity is linked to non-involvement in on-farm physical work. They have reshaped this identity to include some engagement with on-farm physical labor. At the same time, and importantly, like their counterparts cited above, they have not done so by abandoning the more stereotypical assumptions about gendered identities. In contrast, they have emphasized some of these assumptions. They have crossed some boundaries, by involving themselves in on-farm physical work, but like the fishing women studied by Yodanis (2000:282) they have created new “gender boundaries” to mark their identity. These boundaries are marked by what one does (or does not do) when in the paddock working as well as how one dresses and acts when one is in the public domain. They are also marked by ascribing all domestic duties to women and naming women’s tractor work as secondary to this domestic responsibility. Women involved in tractor work may be different from more traditional farming wives. However, they also clearly position themselves to ensure that they are viewed as distinctly different from farming men. Thus, despite women’s involvement in on-farm physical work, the conflation of men, masculinity and farming remains unchallenged.

It is arguable that this may not continue to be the case if the farm as business discourse is more widely adopted. The likelihood that this discourse may offer the potential for reconstituting notions of farming and farmer as gender neutral is, however, limited. Even if the discourse is more widely adopted by farming families there is no likelihood that this would be in a gender neutral way. This is because

notions of business, entrepreneurship and management are themselves gendered (Collinson and Hearn 1994; Baines and Wheelock 2000). Bryant (1999), who has used interviews with forty-four male and female respondents to examine shifts in occupational identities amongst contemporary farmers, has provided evidence of this phenomenon. That is, while she notes the emergence of new occupational identities in agriculture such as "manager" and "entrepreneur", which she says are "chipping away" at more traditional occupational identities in agriculture, there is little evidence that this has led to any significant shifts in rural gender relations (Bryant 1999:254). For example, while the "farm" has been replaced as a "business" or "enterprise", work is still divided according to stereotypical assumptions about gendered work identities. Overall then, while naming themselves as "business partners" may appear to offer farming women the discursive space to reconstitute gendered on-farm roles and identities, such as space, if ever truly available, is likely to be re-colonized and re-gendered along traditional lines.

What the adoption of the "farm as business" discourse is illustrative of is the profound change that has taken place in agriculture in recent years. It is a change which has witnessed the decline of family farming (Lobao and Meyer 2001), the movement of farming women into off-farm work (Leckie 1993), the increased emphasis on knowledge and information for success in farming (Pini 2004a) and the restructuring and deregulation of agricultural industries (Gray and Lawrence 2000). As these and other changes continue to occur in agricultural production, it is likely that further shifts will be evident in how farm men and women position themselves as masculine/feminine subjects. In turn, these changes may further unsettle constructions of the occupational role of "farmer". Thus, we may thus see, in another ten years, far greater shifts in gendered agricultural discourses than this paper has been able to report in comparing findings from a current study with those of Brandth's (1994). Currently, however, in the Australian sugar industry, while the identity of "farm wife" of old may be in the process of being replaced by a "newer" version which incorporates women's involvement in tractor work, the construction of "farmer" as a male identity remains intact.

The findings reported in this paper are limited by the fact that they are produced from a data set obtained from a single industry in a single country. Further, as previously stated, there was a degree of homogeneity amongst the focus group participants. In this respect, the paper points to the need for further comparative work on how on-farm gendered identities may be mediated by differences between women (for example, according to age and class etc) as well as differences between agricultural industries (level of mechanisation and level of corporatisation etc). Such work is important for illuminating further how gender is produced, shaped and resisted in the daily lives and interactions of farming people.

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