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Rural Feminism and Perspectives of Women Farmers in the Agriculture Industry: "I don't think I'd want to be a man in this industry"

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RURAL FEMINISM AND PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN FARMERS IN THE AGRICULTURE
INDUSTRY: “I DON’T THINK I’D WANT TO BE A MAN IN THIS INDUSTRY”

by

CASSIE DUNCAN

(Under the Direction of April Schueths)

ABSTRACT

Women currently make up 36% of the workforce in the agriculture industry and are actively growing in number (National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017). Historically, women’s roles in the agriculture industry were silent or ignored, which has had consequences for women, such as poorer quality of life (Meares, 1997). Today, women are becoming more and more involved in the agriculture industry, but still face inequality in the workplace due to their gender. This research aims to understand the day-to-day experiences and impact of gender for women who work in the production agriculture industry; and by doing so, expand Feminist Theory to include the concept of Rural Feminism. The concept that I call Rural Feminism is a branch of feminism that places an emphasis on the differences between men and women, while also acknowledging the power of being a woman, and is influenced by religion, southern traditions, and what it means to be a woman farmer. The purpose of this research is to explore how women farmers in the Southeastern United States describe their participation based upon gender in the production agriculture industry. Data is collected through in-depth interviews with twelve women farmers in the agriculture industry. Thematic analysis is used to describe how women in agriculture view themselves and their experiences. Key findings include the following five subthemes (1) a woman’s touch, (2) Christianity: “Lord’ll provide, no matter what” (3) sugar britches and old school traditions, (4) a few bad eggs and the strawberry patch, and (5) a bright future for women in agriculture, which all come together to uniquely inform Rural Feminism.

INDEX WORDS: Women in agriculture, Rural sociology, Gender inequality, Rural feminism, Feminist theory, Labeling theory, Farmers, Agriculture

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MASTER OF ARTS

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Electronic Version Approved:
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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the twelve women farmers who helped to create this work. Thank you for your time, commitment, resilience, and above all, passion for agriculture. You all are truly “people that have a beauty within the feminine side” of the production agriculture industry.

This research is dedicated to my loving sisters, Katie, Kelli, Christy, and Kimmie, whom I cherish many farming memories with. Thank you for your passion for agriculture.

This research is dedicated to my grandfather, Bill Chambers, who taught me everything I needed to know about agriculture. Thank you for sharing your passion for agriculture and instilling lifelong values in me.

Lastly, this research is dedicated to my husband, Jeffrey Duncan. Thank you for the helpful conversations, coffee runs, reading multiple versions of this study, and your constant words of encouragement. I truly could not have completed this endeavor without you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	3
LIST OF TABLES.....	5
LIST OF FIGURES.....	6
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	7
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
Growth of Women in Agriculture	9
Previous Roles of Women in Agriculture	9
The Struggle for Women to Identify as Farmers	10
Inequalities in the United States Agriculture Industry	11
Theoretical Framework	12
3 METHODS.....	14
Positioning of the Author.....	14
Participants & Setting.....	14
Data Collection.....	15
Data Analysis	16
Validation Strategies	17
4 FINDINGS.....	19
A Woman’s Touch: An Analysis on Rural Feminism	19
Christianity: “Lord’ll provide, no matter what”	20
Sugar Britches and Old School Traditions	21
A Few Bad Eggs and The Strawberry Patch: “I was always told I could do anything”	25
A Bright Future for Women in Agriculture	27
Rural Feminism.....	29
Outliers	31
5 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	33
Rural Feminism.....	33
Connection to Previous Literature.....	34
Limitations	35
Future Research	35
REFERENCES.....	37
APPENDICES	
A INFORMED CONSENT.....	41
B INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....	44

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants	15

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Data Analysis Spiral	17

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Gender in the workplace has been analyzed in various sociological and psychological studies (Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Hall & Mogyorody, 2007; Chiappe & Butler Flora, 1998). However, gender participation in the agriculture industry with a focus on women has been less analyzed until recently. Women farmers are an understudied yet growing social group, so it is important to see the agriculture industry from their perspective. Beach (2013) states that interviewing farm women specifically about “roles in farming households” and “gender relations” in the agriculture industry would be beneficial and informative because it would allow for the perspective of women in agriculture to be seen and heard. Similarly, Fremstad and Paul (2020) argue that more research needs to be done to investigate how the dynamic of women in agriculture has evolved over time, barriers that entry women farmers may face, and what else can be done to “open the farm gate to women” (p.139).

For many years, women were unacknowledged in the agriculture field, seen only as farm wives or farm helpers instead of farmers (Keller, 2014). The United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) documents that there has been a drastic growth of women farmers in recent years, with women now making up 36% of the farmers in the United States (NASS, 2017). Despite having gained some ground in numbers, women in agriculture still face inequality in their workplace due to their gender identity. However, Ball (2014) claims that “as the number and percentage of women farmers in developed countries increase, the areas of research become more important” and encourages further research on women in agriculture in order to fully understand what is happening in the agriculture industry at this time (p. 602).

This qualitative study seeks to analyze the role of gender in the agriculture field. The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the experiences of women and gender in production agriculture using in-depth interviews. The research question is “How do women farmers in the Southeastern United States describe their participation and experiences based on gender in the production agriculture industry?” Previous literature indicates the struggle for women to be identified as farmers, the gendered perspective in the agriculture industry, and the explanation for the growth of women farmers in recent years (Ball, 2014; Beach, 2013; Pearson, 1979).

Throughout this qualitative study there may be various unfamiliar terms mentioned. This section of the study will define key terms used throughout this paper. Gender is referred to as “the attitudes, behaviors, norms and roles that a society or culture associates with an individual’s sex” or, in other words, the societal differences between female/feminine and male/masculine (Bell, 2013). Agriculture field or

agriculture industry refers to the “establishments primarily engaged in growing crops, raising animals, harvesting timber, and harvesting fish and other animals from a farm, ranch, or their natural habitats” (USDA, 2020). The sector of agriculture that this research will primarily focus on is production agriculture. Production agriculture is a “series of activities that result in a product being sold” including but not limited to livestock production, plant production, timber production and other agricultural bi-product production. (Minnesota Department of Revenue, 2022). The term principal farm operator refers to the individual that oversees all or almost all the farm’s daily functioning and decision making. Woman’s perspective, for the purpose of this paper, will refer to the descriptive view of women in the agriculture industry. Key terms in relation to location may also be mentioned throughout this study. Geographic locations may be referred to as the Southeastern United States. The states included in this bracket are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. The strengths to this study taking place in the Southeastern United States include that this area holds traditionally conservative values relating to gender and is in the Bible Belt, which differentiates this study from similar studies across the nation. The Southeastern United States is diversified in production agriculture with over 400,000 farm operators serving as part of the Southeastern farming community, which is the second largest agricultural region after the Midwest (Southeast Agriculture, 2021).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are four primary findings found in the literature. These are (1) growth of women in agriculture, (2) previous roles of women in agriculture, (3) the struggle for women to identify as farmers, and (4) inequalities in the United States agriculture industry. These previous findings are connected to the research of this paper through their incorporation of the women farmers' viewpoints and roles within the agriculture industry. While these are the themes found in previous literature, researchers recognize that the findings of this study may be different. After reviewing the relevant literature, I will discuss the theoretical framework used, which influences a term I call Rural Feminism.

Growth of Women in Agriculture

There are currently 1.2 million women producers in American agriculture with women-operated farms accounting for 38% of United States agriculture sales (NASS, 2017). However, while women are underrepresented in the agriculture industry, they are slowly growing in number. Women farmers are slightly younger than men in the industry and are more likely to be a beginner farmer, which means they may already be starting out with a disadvantage in the industry (NASS, 2017). Ball (2014) discusses three primary reasons for the growth of women in agriculture: an increased demand for niche products (such as organic fruits and vegetables), a decrease in average farm size, and greater societal acceptance of women in the industry. She further explains the changes in societal acceptance in two main categories, which relates most to this study. She states that the first category is a "change in attitudes such that women feel they have freedom to choose the occupation" (p. 601). The second is "a change in farm culture making it more acceptable for a woman to take control of farm operations when her parents age and/or die, became a widow, and continued to operate the farm after her husband's death, and/or a woman to keep and operate the farm after divorce" (p.601). Ball (2014) concludes with the idea that due to the growing number of women in agriculture, there is a need for more research to be done that highlights their perspective in the agriculture industry. This research will help to fill that need.

Previous Roles of Women in Agriculture

Historically, women in the agriculture industry have had a significant yet silenced role. In this historical role, "gender is inherent as women are the unpaid and invisible labor force" in the agriculture industry (Contzen & Forney, 2016, p. 27). There is a fair selection of rural sociological research in general that discusses men in the agriculture industry (Nusbauer, 2011; Saugeres, 2002; Anderson 2020). However, there is an absence of the woman's perspective, even though their "contributions were essential

to the viability of family farms” (Keller, 2014, p. 77). Meares (1997) agrees with this by stating that “while studies in the middle of the century tended to emphasize farm women’s roles as mothers and homemakers...research constitutes that this is mostly a narrow-sighted and partial view of the social reality” in the agriculture industry (p. 27). Farm women often completed tasks such as growing a summer garden, caring for livestock, selling produce, and took part in intensive labor on the farm (Meares, 1997, p. 28-30). Though this study cannot identify perspectives of women in agriculture that have happened a century or even decades ago, it can record and preserve the experiences of those living now.

Fremstad and Paul (2020) offer a clear historical background of women working in the agricultural industry. They discussed legal barriers that women faced, such as access to farmland. Married women in the United States were not able to own land under American Common Law until 1850. While women can own farmland today, it is still a scarce and expensive commodity, and there are new challenges that make acquiring farmland difficult for women, with many of these challenges remaining gender specific. Some of these challenges include financing markets, agricultural training and education, suitable working conditions, and equal treatment by those in the industry, both individual and organizational (Kennedy-Duckett, 2022). Furthermore, the USDA has been collecting statistics and data on farms and farmers since 1840, but data on women farmers specifically was not collected until 1978, less than 50 years ago (Fremstad & Paul, 2020, p.127). Fremstad and Paul (2020) note that, despite the agriculture industry depending on women’s work all along, women continued to be invisible to the academic and social world. Similarly, the USDA (2021) claims that “women have been a critical part of farm and ranch operations across the country and across the globe for centuries,” but it isn’t until now that “[women in agriculture] have a unique opportunity to be the change we want to see in our industry”. However, researchers disagree about how much “opportunity” is really there for women in agriculture.

The Struggle for Women to Identify as Farmers

Even though women have had a place in the agriculture industry for some time, there is still a struggle for women to have the title “farmer” instead of “farm wife” or other similar secondary terms. For example, Beach (2013) states that:

traditionally, women on farms have been defined in terms of their marital relationship as farmwives instead of in terms of their connections to the land, the farms, or their children as farmers, farm women, or farm mothers (p. 212).

Similarly, Keller (2014) discusses how masculinity and femininity have been shaped over time by gendered symbolic categories of farmer and farm wife. She argues that women often face an “uphill battle in asserting themselves as farmers” (p. 76). Keller (2014) also discusses how there has been growing

literature on rural masculinity, but the same cannot be said for what I call Rural Feminism. Rural Feminism is a branch of feminism that emphasizes the differences between men and women while also acknowledging the power of being a woman, and is influenced by religion, southern traditions, and what it means to be a woman farmer. These concepts and attributes will be discussed further along in this paper. By focusing my study specifically on women in the production agriculture industry, it will provide insight into what Rural Feminism may look like for women in the Southeastern states.

Hall and Mogyorody (2007) completed a study on gender and the labor process specific to farming. One of the findings from this study was that men in the agriculture industry tended to “underestimate their spouse’s contribution” to work done on the farm (p.293). This was similar to Beach’s (2013) findings that women in the agriculture industry were portrayed as “the supporter of the male farmer, the homemaker, or the one who raises the children and cares for the elders” (p.212). While men in the agriculture industry agree that women do have a place in the industry, they disagree over the value of contributions of women. The only way to help women identify as farmers is to “open the farm gate to women by shredding historically entrenched patriarchal roles and norms” (Fremstad & Paul, 2020, p.125). Organizations such as *Farmher* and *The Female Farmer Project* (FFP) help “give a powerful voice to the fastest growing demographic in agriculture - the female farmer” (FFP, 2021). These organizations document the lives of women farmers across the United States, hold conferences, offer a way for women farmers to unite, and publish stories of women farmers and issues they face.

Inequalities in the United States Agriculture Industry

It is no secret that discrimination is present in the agriculture industry. There have been several lawsuits filed under the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) against the USDA. Some of these most famous lawsuits include Love vs. Vislack, Pigford vs. Glickman, and Keepseagle vs. Vislack. These lawsuits were filed because the USDA was accused of “discriminating against African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and female farmers in various programs” that were offered to people working in the agriculture industry (USDA, 2011). There is a “long history of structural discrimination in U.S. agriculture...[and] this history continues to impact farmers today” (Horst & Marion, 2019, p. 13).

Specifically, the Love vs. Vislack case was a woman farmer class action settlement suit. It was filed in October of 2000 by several farmers who claimed they were discriminated against because of their gender when applying to farm loan programs (USDA, 2011). The case was ruled in favor of the women farmers. Funds of \$1.23 to \$1.33 billion were set aside for women farmers who were successful in their discrimination claims (USDA, 2011). Today, there are still disparities in the agriculture industry across race, ethnicity, gender, and income (Ball, 2014; Contzen & Forney, 2017; Moon, 2019).

This review of the literature helps build a foundational understanding of the data and experiences of women farmers' that has been done, though it is not all encompassing. As mentioned briefly above, there is a lack of literature on women farmers in developed countries as well as farm statistics collected by the USDA on women farmers. The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of women farmers in production agriculture, which is done by looking through a new lens of what I call Rural Feminism.

Theoretical Framework

The perspective found in this study, and the collection of articles within the literature review, encompasses Feminist Theory. This theory aims to recognize the differences that gender plays in an area(s) or aspect(s) of life. The research found in this paper is structured by two different theories that build a conceptual framework: difference feminism and labeling theory. Difference feminism is a branch of feminism that emphasizes the biological differences between men and women, the different characteristics of men and women, and the different roles of men and women (Gilligan, 2009). For example, researchers found that women struggle with being offered leadership roles, reject the negative connotations of feminism (such as bra-burning or being men haters), and hold an initial understanding of feminism enough to have conversation about it (Valdejuli & Nieves, 2020). This concept of feminism is unique; most women who identify with this branch of feminism do not consider themselves feminist and place such an emphasis on the differences between men and women, arguing that because of these differences, men and women should not be seen as the same. Difference feminist theory produces a “defense of culturally or naturally based gender roles and expectations” that acknowledge the distinction between men and women and that the distinction is important (Valdejuli & Nieves, 2020, p.134).

In addition, labeling theory is a sociological theory that focuses on social labeling and the impact that has on individuals. Labels can lead to unfair or harmful stereotypes, stigmas, discrimination, poor self-image, and social exclusion (Bernburg, 2019). Annes and colleagues (2020) discuss how women on French farms are labeled as farm wives by default due to the culture of the French agriculture industry. They further discuss the labels of rural hegemonic masculinity and femininity, which reinforces what is gender-appropriate in the agriculture industry. However, some women “disrupt hegemonic gender relations” by labeling themselves as just farmers - not farm wives, not farm helpers, not women farmers (Annes & colleagues, 2020). Using feminist theory and labeling theory, this research aims to describe the experiences of women farmers in the agriculture industry. This research pulls from feminist theory and labeling theory and expands them to create the term Rural Feminism. Rural Feminism, discussed later in the findings and discussion sections, is unique in that most women farmers who have views aligning with difference feminism do not consider themselves feminist. Instead, they emphasize the differences between

men and women, arguing that men and women should not be seen as the same because of these differences, whether due to biology, religion, or emotions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Positioning of the Author

Holmes (2020) states that “positionality is integral to the process of qualitative research”, especially for graduate level researchers (p.8). I am the author and primary researcher for this study. I am currently a graduate student at Georgia Southern University obtaining my Master of Arts in Social Sciences. I received a Bachelor of Science in Sociology with a minor in Psychology from Georgia Southern University in December of 2020. I have held many assistantships at Georgia Southern University that allowed me to work directly with professors on research. I am also teaching an introductory sociology class for Georgia Southern University. My research interests include rural sociology topics, such as women in agriculture, the Farm Bill, family farm dynamics, and aging in the agriculture industry.

I am a White, cisgender woman who has grown up in the agriculture industry. I come from a farming family who has farmed for decades. I have four siblings who are also all women, some of whom are also pursuing careers in the agriculture industry. I have spent a significant amount of time in the agriculture industry including being involved with the National Future Farmers of America Organization (FFA) and the Georgia Farm Bureau (GFB). These experiences have allowed me to build connections with other women in the agriculture industry as well as build rapport and trust with the participants of this study. My research is informed by giving women farmers in the Southeastern United States a platform to share their experiences. My research is, in part, funded by the Graduate Student Organization at Georgia Southern University.

Participants & Setting

There was a total of twelve women farmers who participated in this study. Participants were required to meet the following qualifications to participate in this study: be at least 18 years of age, identify as a woman, live, and work in the Southeastern United States, read, speak, and understand English, and have been involved in the production agriculture industry for at least three years prior to the interview. The average participant was White, educated, married, lived, and worked in the state of Georgia and was raised on a family farm. The average age of the participants was 44 years old, and at least all decades were represented in age from 20's to 60's. The size of the farms ranged in size and type

and included plant production, livestock production, a honeybee farm, and a university research farm. A more detailed listing of the demographics of participants can be found below in Table 1: Demographics.

Table 1: Demographics

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Education	Marital Status	State	# Years Farming	Raised on Farm
Elenor	25	White	Bachelors	Engaged	FL	10	Yes
Kelly	39	White	Masters	Married	AL	9.5	Yes
Louise	41	White	Bachelors	Married	GA	41	Yes
Kimberly	28	White	Masters	Single	GA	28	Yes
Patsy	51	White	Masters	Married	GA	51	Yes
Christy	66	White	Masters	Married	NC	18	No
Madison	51	White	Bachelors	Single	GA	30	Yes
JoJo	51	White	Specialist*	Married	GA	3	No
Annie	37	White	< HS**	Married	GA	35	Yes
Carmen	33	White	Masters	Married	GA	33	Yes
Charlie	63	Black	Associates	Single	TN	5	No
Jessie	44	White	Bachelors	Married	GA	44	Yes

*A Specialist degree is an academic degree conferred by a college or university that is after a Bachelor's degree and before a Doctorate degree.

**less than High School

Data Collection

An IRB proposal was approved for this study by Georgia Southern University. Most of the in-depth interviews were conducted virtually over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews took place from February of 2021 to May of 2021. About one quarter of the interviews were done over the phone to accommodate the busy lives of women farmers. Interviews ranged from eighteen minutes to an hour and twelve minutes in length, with the average interview lasting thirty-eight minutes. All the

interviews were recorded live on my computer and took place at various times of the day as participants were available. Interviews were also recorded on a phone recorder for back up. Transcripts were produced for all interviews and demographic data was inserted into a spreadsheet. I personally conducted and transcribed all the interviews. Anonymity of the participants was kept by excluding any personal identifying information in the transcripts, such as places of employment or names of spouses. All participants were given a pseudonym to further protect their anonymity. Pseudonyms were listed on the demographic spreadsheet so that I could recall which pseudonym went with each true participant name in case of the need for further contact.

All interviews included a brief demographic survey at the beginning. Some of the demographic questions asked include race, age, and marital status (see Table 1: Demographics above). Participants were recruited through word of mouth, snow-ball sampling, and through agricultural organizations and conferences, such as the Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, Georgia. Informed consent was collected from all participants before the interview took place. Informed consent was collected essentially twice per participant, once over email and again verbally before the interview started. The informed consent form can be found below in Appendix A. Once the interview had been scheduled, the researcher emailed an informed consent form to those who were interested in the study. There were a total of seven demographic questions and eighteen planned interview questions with some questions in some interviews being prompted. Examples of the types of questions asked include “What is it like being a woman farmer in the agriculture industry?”, “Do you think gender affects your opportunities in the agriculture industry?” and “Do men and women have different roles in the agriculture industry?” The full interview schedule can be found in Appendix B.

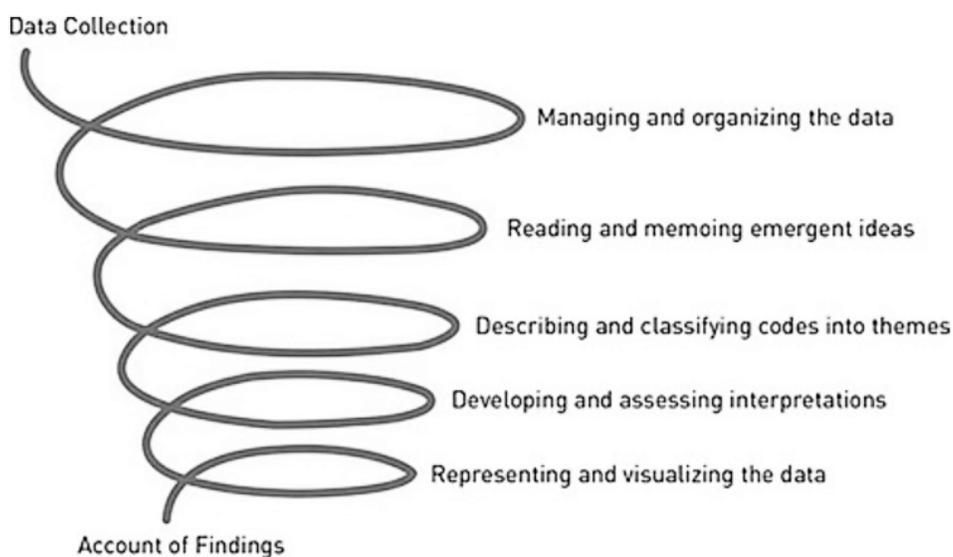
Data Analysis

Qualitative Thematic Analysis was used for this study. The data analysis for this study started immediately after the first interview. I analyzed the data of this study by looking for common, underlying themes between all the interviews as well as outliers in the data. The data analysis happened concurrently with the data collection so that the primary researcher was able to fully understand the data as well as consider if there are other questions that should be added to the interview schedule. After about four interviews, more questions were added. For example, I later added in the questions “what does feminism mean or not mean to you as a woman in agriculture?” and “Are religion and agriculture connected?” I added in additional questions because I began seeing NVivo themes appear through the voices of the participants. For example, without prompting, the women farmers would talk about religion or not being a feminist. These additional questions later formed key subthemes for the findings of this project. Though

the results may not be fully generalizable, they will allow sociologists to better understand the experiences of women in the agriculture industry.

Data was analyzed using the Creswell and Poth (2018) Data Analysis Spiral. This allows for the researcher to analyze the data through the “process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (p.185). The Data Analysis Spiral consists of organizing the data, memoizing ideas as they emerge, describing and classifying codes, assessing interpretations, and representing the data. The Data Analysis Spiral can be seen below in Figure 1. After the primary researcher read through the transcripts, there were a total of fifty-four codes in the initial round of coding. Some of these codes included “work ethic”, “leadership”, “struggle for opportunity”, “religion”, “independence”, “stereotypes”, and “traditional”. These codes were narrowed down to form five subthemes and inform the overarching theme of rural feminism further discussed in the findings section.

Figure 1: Data Analysis Spiral



Validation Strategies

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend having at least two validation strategies for research. The research that I have completed is validated using five different strategies. These strategies are (1) generating thick, rich descriptions in my findings section, (2) having a peer review the data and process done in my Qualitative Data Analysis class, (3) discovering a negative case analysis or outlier (discussed below in my discussion), (4) clarifying research bias which can be found above in the *Positioning of the Author* section above, and (5) having prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, which can also be found in the *Positioning of the Author* section. I have also completed a pilot study in an

undergraduate course of this same study with three women in the agriculture industry. The pilot study resulted in similar themes. Those themes were (1) religiosity, (2) discrimination in the agriculture industry, and (3) difference in sectors within the agriculture industry.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The five subthemes that emerged from the narratives of the participants remarkably outline the experiences of women farmers in the Southeastern United States, as well as provide a new lens of feminist theory: Rural Feminism. The subthemes were (1) a woman's touch, (2) Christianity: "Lord'll provide, no matter what" (3) sugar britches and old school traditions, (4) a few bad eggs and the strawberry patch and (5) a bright future for women in agriculture. A combination of these five subthemes help to inform Rural Feminism, which is the main finding of the whole study.

A Woman's Touch: An Analysis on Rural Feminism

Rural Feminism places an emphasis on the similarities and differences of men and women. Half of the participants expressed that being a woman is what made their contribution to their farm and the agriculture industry so special. Participants discussed what it meant to be a woman farmer in a mostly man-dominated work environment. Elenor, age 25 and the youngest of the participants in the study mentioned "a woman's touch" throughout her interview. She explains:

I think they [women farmers] are strong willed. They are passionate...but they do all that with like, a woman's touch, like a maternal instinct if you will...I think that the maternal female touch on stuff is what makes women in ag their, their influence so much more powerful...It all comes back to like the maternal instinct and the, the mother's touch if you will. We don't even have to be mothers, but just like the woman's touch on everything. I think there's something to be said on that approach to a lot of business things.

Elenor was not the only woman who thought about nurturing or maternal instincts when discussing what it means to be a woman farmer. Christy, age 66 and the oldest of the women farmers also discussed how women have a nurturing character that makes their contributions to the agriculture industry valuable. She states that "when men farm, a family will eat good. When women farm, the community eats good," as she goes on to explain that women farmers care for others and the land. Loving the land and nurturing the land is a subtheme that comes up with many of the women farmers, including Charlie, who is a poultry farmer. When I asked Charlie what characteristics or qualities a woman farmer has, she responded that "[women farmers] love the land, they maybe, there's a nurturing inside of you." This nurturing or "woman's touch" if you will, is a distinctive part of Rural Feminism.

Along with maternal instincts, participants also explained other characteristics that women farmers must create that woman's touch in agriculture. During an interview with Kimberly, who was driving to her office after feeding cattle, explained what qualities women farmers possess. She tells me:

Usually women have to have, working in the agricultural field in my opinion, you have to have a good sense of humor... a strong work ethic, somebody who takes initiative to get stuff done, has a high interest, a positive attitude, likes working with other people, likes working with cattle, has respect for the land, just basic things like that... Again being like detail-oriented, communication skills, a lot of different things that I hope there's more opportunities for women in all roles of agriculture.

Many of the women in the study mentioned the importance of having a good work ethic and communication skills. Other characteristics or qualities that were mentioned included strength, resilience, creativity, flexibility, organizational skills, open-mindedness, and the ability to multitask. Participants also mentioned how the face of agriculture is changing. Louise talks about how "a lot of people still have that view of the farmer as like, a gothic painting. You know, the one with the farmer and the pitchfork and his wife". Carmen tells me that the first image that comes to mind when thinking of a farmer is an "old, White man". However, participants feel that women farmers are becoming more and more common in the agriculture industry, and with that they are bringing their perspective, strengths, and personal feminine touch. The woman's touch in agriculture serves as a foundational approach to better understanding Rural Feminism.

Christianity: "Lord'll provide, no matter what"

Religion, specifically Christianity, was an important subtheme that helps build the concept of Rural Feminism in the south. Christianity impacts the way women farmers see the world and is an integral part of day-to-day activities. As Kelly states while she is telling me about the farm she grew up on "pray for rain, then you prayed it would stop raining long enough to get the crops out the field". Religion is an important aspect of life for many in the Southeastern United States, known as the Bible Belt or the Deep South (Hobby, 2022). Kelly continues telling me about her faith as she comments that she believes the "Lord'll provide no matter what" when asked about the qualities that women farmers have.

The agriculture industry can also be a conservative and traditional place, which often includes religious ties. Christy describes the south as a "very White, religious, red area". When asked about opportunities in the industry around race and sexual orientation, Kimberly states "it can be discriminated

upon very quickly, especially for us being in the Bible Belt”. Religion, specifically Christianity, plays a part in the agriculture industry and in Rural Feminism. Kimberly explains:

For me it’s just many people are very traditional. Personally, I don’t know any farmers that aren’t Christians. Because in my opinion it’s very hard to be a farmer and not be a Christian and see life and death and the peaks and valleys and the miracles on the farm. I know that sounds a little cliché, but it’s taught me to be able to live with a lot of those things...I definitely think that agriculture and Christianity are very much tied together.

After noticing that religion seemed to be a common subtheme with women farmers without being prompted, I then added a question about religion to the interview schedule. I asked women farmers if religion and agriculture were related. Overwhelmingly, the response was yes. Madison is a fourth-generation farmer who owns and operates a cotton gin. She tells me how her faith ties into her experiences in the agriculture industry expressing that:

I think you can thank God every day that you wake up, have a beautiful day, and your crops are growing...I do think it plays a part...[for] the majority of the people who do farm. I think it’s a big part of it.

Other women agree with Madison about the tie that religion and agriculture have. The women who discussed their faith mentioned how they must rely upon God in many circumstances because of the uncontrollable elements in the agriculture industry. Some of the uncontrollable elements mentioned included weather, rain, insects, deer, and temperature. While I did not directly ask women which religion they affiliated with, all but a few mentioned their religion in some context, with most of the women referencing Christianity indirectly. This sense of religiosity, specifically Christianity, is another important component of Rural Feminism.

Sugar Britches and Old School Traditions

All participants in this study referenced the traditionality of the agriculture industry and how this can have negative impacts on women farmers. While some of the participants write off this traditionality as “traditional roles within their family business” or people just being “stuck in the old, old ways” it is easy to see the negative effects. For starters, women farmers feel as if they are not always treated fairly or given the same level of respect as men farmers, despite being equally or more educated than men farmers. If you look back at the demographic table, all but one farmer held significant higher education. However,

this doesn't seem to make much of a difference in the way women are treated or respected in the agriculture industry. Kimberly, a bubbly woman who managed to squeeze in my interview in the midst of feeding livestock, tells me:

people don't always take you seriously as a woman in agriculture... Sometimes it's challenging again as a female. Just people don't always give you the same credit that they would a man. I've had some very rough conversations I guess would be a good way to put it... I do think the level of respect is often different, especially being in agriculture in the south you kind of get some of that, traditional roles. It's not always popular to have a woman in the workplace. I mean, obviously things evolved some in 2022 but when you're with those farmers sometimes that's not always as easy because they grew up very traditional and still maintain a lot of those old school traditions.

Kimberly discusses the "traditional roles" in the agriculture industry. Some of these roles include women not driving the tractor or operating farm machinery, women not being the primary farm owner and operator, or women not attending agricultural meetings such as Cattlemen's Association Meetings or Farm Bureau meetings. The "traditional roles" for women may look like more secretarial roles on the farm, marketing and selling the farm product, and assisting the primary farm operator with a clear distinction of who the primary farm operator is. Like Kimberly, Elenor tells me how her gender affects her opportunities in the agriculture industry through "imposed ceilings" or expectations placed on her because she is a woman farmer when she remarks:

I have been in beef production and that is a man's world and men feel very threatened by women when they are in charge... somebody told me one time 'well, since you're a woman, you're not always going to be able to be on the back of a horse, like you're gonna have to find an office job somewhere' and I was like 'I just don't think so'. I don't think that's how it works. I think you set your mind to something, and you do what you want. So, I would say, I would say there are like super imposed ceilings that the industry puts on you... You're treated differently because they [men] don't think you're capable or they don't think you're doing it the way they should do it.

Being treated differently was an incredibly common subtheme for the women farmers that I interviewed. Sometimes being treated differently looked like other farmers not thinking you were capable, being called inappropriate names, not being listened to, or even not being hired. Annie, a farmer who has been driving the tractor since the ripe age of three years old, tells me about how a man farmer would not employ her because “he didn’t want women on his farm. He always claimed he didn’t want to make accommodations...it was just his rule, like he would just not hire women”. For Kelly, the head of a university research farm and co-principal farm operator with her husband, being treated differently meant that men farmers and farm workers offered her help more often, even with simple farm tasks such as backing up a trailer. Kelly gives me an example of working with men in the industry:

I believe they probably tend to offer help more readily because I am a female, but I’ve, especially when it comes to backing up a trailer, we have a really long trailer at work that’s actually a hay hauler, and the first time I ever drive it one of my farm crew was trying to help guide me when I was backing it to unhook it. And I was like ‘okay, stop. I appreciate what you’re doing, but this will go much faster if you go back to the shop and let me do this myself’.

Likewise, Carmen, who has worked in multiple agriculture sectors and is at least a third-generation farmer tells me about an experience she had at an agricultural meeting. Carmen walked into the room for the meeting and “they came up to me and said, ‘would you like to join [the women’s version of the agricultural organization]?’ And I said ‘well, what does that mean?’ Women farmers embrace their femininity, but do not want to be looked at differently in the workplace. Multiple women farmers told me about the reality of working with men at these agricultural meetings. For instance, Jessie tells me about how she walked into a room full of older, White men for a meeting. After walking in, she received the remark “well, don’t you add color to the room?” She tells me they were acting as if “[I] don’t really need to be there, like, you know, ‘what are you doing here? Well, you add color to the room’. And [I] was kind of like ‘yeah, that’s why I’m here’”. Charlie relates by adding that when she tells people she’s a woman poultry farmer explaining:

They think I have, you know, like 10 chickens in the back and I’m picking up eggs. I’m like, [laughs] no. More like 300 to 500 layers. Okay? Meat birds. Yes, eggs are being laid, but I’m selling chicks. I’m selling pre-layers. They’re [men farmers] like ‘what? You’re

commercial?’ Yes, is that a problem? [laughs] They’re not expecting that.

Charlie tells me throughout the interview that there have been multiple instances where people didn’t think she was a farmer. She says that for society, “women and farming don’t go together, even though we know we have them”.

Along with being treated differently due to traditional values in the agriculture industry, two of the participants also discussed sexual and verbal harassment. The barriers that women farmers face in the agriculture industry left Louise feeling uncertain about what her career would look like. She explains “I was hesitant entering agriculture and opening a business...you know it’s a rural county, and sometimes, sometimes the older generation is slow to adapt”. Louise works in plant production and often attends agricultural expos, fairs, and meetings. She recalls going on a three-day agriculture show in order to showcase her products but ended up being spoken to inappropriately – something that would have been far less likely to happen to a man in this industry. She explains:

On the second day, this d-, I have no nice words for this human. This human from [state] looked me up and down like a piece of meat. And just, I mean, called me sugar britches. And I was like ‘you are disgusting’. And I held my own. I fired right back at him.

Louise continues her story by saying how another exhibitor, who was a man, stepped in on her behalf. The man who called her sugar britches ended up getting kicked out of the agriculture show. She concludes her story by telling me “I definitely felt, it was a good and bad feeling. One, I knew that he had my back, but at the same time did he jump to my defense because he thought I couldn’t hold my own?” Similar to Louise, Elenor tells me about her experiences with working with men in the agriculture industry. She tells me:

Oh man, [deep exhale]. Whether they [men] know it or not, I mean this [pause]. There’s a lot of sexual harassment that goes on both knowingly and unknowingly. There’s a lot of like ‘oh, are you sure you should be doing this?’ And, and this and that.... I just think there’s a lot of deep seated opinions, emotions, and kind of boundaries that you stay in, in the ag industry.

For the majority of the women, being treated differently, respected less, having “imposed ceilings” and being called names like “sugar britches” happens too often in the agriculture industry.

According to the women farmers, the difference in treatment or respect is due to the traditional nature of the agriculture industry. As she was driving from the field, Patsy explained to me that “we’re in a man’s world really. Traditionally, agriculture is a man’s world.” Although these experiences are negative, participants also tell me about the good people in the agriculture industry. All these experiences help to create the concept of Rural Feminism for women farmers in the Southeastern United States.

A Few Bad Eggs and The Strawberry Patch: “I was always told I could do anything”

While many of the women farmers in this study had some negative interactions with men in this industry, they were also reassuring me that this was just the case of a “few bad eggs”. This is also a distinctive characteristic of Rural Feminism, which can be explained better in the words of Louise below. She suggests:

You know, I’ve run into things in the past, like you always run into it. There’s a few bad eggs everywhere, you know, people who [say] ‘what are you doing running a business?’ So, this or, this or that way, you know but that’s not the majority of the folks we run into...So, I mean you have stuff like that, but we got so many good people in our industry I would have a hard time saying, you know, that was the attitude of everybody.

In fact, roughly half of the participants specifically told me about the good men in the industry. These were often men relatives such as husbands, brothers, uncles, fathers, and grandfathers. It was clear that having a paternal familial tie was an important part of these women’s lives on the farm. Not only because it made farming more accessible, but also because of the support they received. It’s also important to note here that while having a paternal tie offers more support and potentially a broader network, women still typically rely on other men for entry into the production agriculture industry. For example, Kelly tells me when she thinks of a farmer, she often thinks of “my dad and granddad in a hayfield”. Like Kelly, after Elenor tells me about a negative experience with men in the agriculture industry, she follows up with an example of a good experience. She observes:

Then, there’s also, there’s also some [men] that are so proud of you for like paving the way because like, especially if they have daughters. If they have daughters, then they see it as like if she can do it, my kid can do it kind of deal. But I’ve definitely had both ends of the spectrum of like being taken advantage of because you’re a woman and being very

respected because you're, you're kind of not falling into the mold of everything.

Majority of the women had a "I think that women could do anything that men can do" attitude. For example, Carmen laughs and tells me that while she and her husband have different roles on the family farm, "I can do just about anything that he can do. And sometimes I might even say even better, right?" This can-do attitude was present amongst many of the women, but they also believe in a gentleman's "southern chivalry". Patsy tells me about how difficult it is to open a gap gate, which is a gate that holds lots of tension and is built up of wire and a wooden post. It takes a fair amount of strength to open a gap. Patsy expresses that while she is capable of opening a gap, she is "kind of thrilled that I'm still married to a man who's, you know, he still believes in southern chivalry, and he'll jump off and get that for me." This idea of being capable, but also being treated like a southern lady is a characteristic that is unique to Rural Feminism.

Louise, a third-generation farmer, also tells me about the relationship with her grandfather who was "a dirt farmer, and a peach farmer, and a cattleman". She tells me about how generous and loving the farmers she knows well have been throughout her life and how this started when she was just four years old with her grandfather encouraging her interest in agriculture. Louise points out:

My grandfather always, I was always told I could do anything. Anything. Like, and he always, he, he totally reinforced that, Like, and I'll just tell you this story. There was a strawberry patch in my grandparent's front yard.... They would harvest those strawberries and sell them...It got time to dig up those strawberries. They weren't producing as well as they should...Granddaddy said 'well, what are we going to do here, baby?' and I said 'we're gonna plant seeds in a circle'.... And he said 'okay' and that's what we did, right in the middle of the front yard. [laughs] So, I was just, I was always given this free range to just do whatever and explore and do.

Having an important family member, specifically a man in agriculture, helped to build a foundation for many of the women farmers in this study. Whether it be a husband, father or another close relative, the women expressed to me how special those bonds were to their success in agriculture. Louise concludes her strawberry story by telling me that the experience with her grandfather and the strawberry patch "set the tone for everything" else she has experienced in the agriculture industry.

A Bright Future for Women in Agriculture

The women for this study were asked about their past and current experiences as well as what they hope the future of agriculture will look like for women. All the women in this study wanted to see more women involved in agriculture, whether that be leadership positions, management positions, political positions, or furthering their education in the agriculture industry. A few women even mentioned how there rarely is a woman Secretary of Agriculture for the United States, and how they felt a woman could be capable of that position. The United States has had one woman Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman in 2001 (USDA, 2022). Women farmers want to see women involved with the USDA, the Farm Service Agency (FSA), and other major agricultural organizations. Louise tells me:

I mean, there's a lot of opportunity. There really is. There's so much being done; the future is just bright. The future for women overall is very bright in ag...I'd also love to see a new generation of women step up and take hold, you know, and start these farms.

Kimberly happily remarks that she hopes the future of women in agriculture is “headed somewhere good.” She continues by informing me that the percentage of women farmers is growing in the United States and is currently between 30% and 40%, which is true (NASS, 2017). Similarly, Elenor also talks about how the future for women in agriculture is bright. She contends:

I think there's going to be a lot more women leaders in agriculture, because they see that women are getting more traction on the, the larger stages in the ag industry in general...I think there's, I think there's a brighter future for women in ag because right now women in ag are paving the way for it to be, not easier, but just more of a path for success.

Some of the women make an interesting point about the growth of women in agriculture. Although women are growing in number, the gender roles are still persistent. Madison explains to me that we will continue seeing men on the manual labor side of the industry, but women farmers will be doing the marketing, selling, and other office work. The reasoning she gives for this is the physical differences between men and women. The physical and biological differences between men and women is a concept that comes up throughout the interviews. Charlie started her farm herself and had no ties to agriculture, with the exception of some of her ancestors who she has never met. She's a charismatic woman who has a passion for her poultry farm where she does livestock conservancy. Her perspective on these roles is

unique because she is an outsider to an extent, with no prior connection to the agriculture industry. She explained to me:

It seems to be he's out there working the farm. She's doing the books.
That's typical. She may go out and help him with a few things...But by and large when I've helped or volunteered or whatever, she's coming out cause she's like 'oh, there's a woman out there'. Yes, honey. I'm not trying to take your husband, okay? I'm out here trying to learn about this shit that I don't know because I didn't have time to be on a farm.

Charlie initially didn't think there were differences in women's and men's roles. However, by the time she finished telling me the above statement she noted to herself "I don't think there should be [different roles], but there seems to be."

Kelly agrees that women in agriculture are "definitely increasing" by number. She also discusses the importance of mentorship and leadership of other women within the agriculture community. Kelly tells me how she and six other women hosted a "southern women in ag hands-on workshop" where they taught other women various farming tasks, such as backing up a trailer, operating farm equipment, and driving cattle. She explains:

We traveled around to different parts of the state. And the idea was to get women who were interested out and actually on different pieces of equipment, actually working cattle...I want to say we did four different workshops that were always full...The demographics were all over the board, and those were the most fun when you just had the young and the old. I believe one lady said she was in her eighties, and she wanted to come and just drive a tractor...So, it was very good, even networking experience.

Just as Kelly does, Kimberly also talks about how it helps to have connections with other women in agriculture. She tells me about how her county has a local agriculture extension agent who is a woman, and a close friend. She explains how women in leadership positions could help the future of women in agriculture when she says:

I do think that from what I've talked to her and myself that again, women are not always taken seriously at their first say at things. And so, if there's a woman in a leadership role, she might be willing to lend a ear to a younger woman who's got something to say that can make an impactful difference in a business. So, I would really love to see more women in ag leadership roles.

Rural Feminism

All the emerging subthemes connect and influence Rural Feminism, a type of feminism commonly held by women farmers in the Southeastern United States. This branch of feminism incorporates many of the things these women spoke with me about: maternal touch, religiosity, differentiation in respect, the ability to achieve, building relationships with other women in agriculture, the differences between men and women, not considering themselves a feminist, amongst many other characteristics. Rural Feminism is a new and rather undiscovered branch of feminism that I feel the women of this study put into words better than I can. As Louise puts it, “my voice matters just as much as anyone else’s.”

Kelly is confident throughout her interview that she is fully capable of doing anything a man can do, while also making the joke that she never has to “do entertaining things such as [finding] a hay bale when we’re working cows”, referring to men and going to the bathroom outside. On a more serious note, Kelly tells me about her experience interviewing for her current position on the university research farm. She describes:

When I interviewed for my position, now once again, I’m the first female [position]. I interviewed with a group of men and the farm crew actually. And since they can’t approach the topic of my gender, I did. And I said ‘look, if you have concerns about me being a female, then don’t hire me. I’m perfectly happy where I’m at. Can I do this job? Yes. Can I do it well? Yes.

Elenor tells me that there are differences between men and women in the agriculture industry, but that it is not a bad thing. She also hints that some of these differences are due to religious values, which shows how religion impacts Rural Feminism. Elenor admits:

I mean we were designed, biologically designed differently. To think differently. To act differently. I think, I think there’s a lot of judgment because of how things have always been so to speak, on how women approach things versus how men do it.

Kimberly also spends a significant amount of our interview time telling me about the difference between men and women and how this affects the agriculture industry. As she discusses the strengths and weaknesses between men and women, she also reassures me that it does not mean a woman is not capable of doing it. Women farmers conform to some of the “old school traditions” that were mentioned earlier while also ensuring people that is a choice – not because they cannot do it. Kimberly explains:

I believe men and women have different strengths and weaknesses, and that can often lead to different places in the ag industry. I don't believe that men or women should be excluded from any opportunity within ag... There's a lot of male production farmers but just because they're doing it that doesn't mean that females can't plow a field or milk a cow as well. So, I think that their strengths and weaknesses may lead them to different roles within the ag industry.... But I definitely think there are some strong suits that women bring to the table that, you know, men may not always carry.

Relative to Kimberly's idea of it being a choice, JoJo also explains to me a similar idea. When I asked JoJo, a honey-bee farmer, what feminism meant to her, she became hesitant and maybe even a little uncomfortable. She tells me, "I'm not a feminist first of all. I think that when, anytime that there's a conversation about that, this topic, people get intimidated." She continues talking and explaining how feminism often intimidates men and that:

I think in the south there are more, probably women have been suppressed and they're just in progress by choice often. I don't think they, and I'm thinking about women that I know. My friends of mine, my family's, whatever. I don't think they necessarily want to move into leadership roles that men are traditionally in.

Part of our conversation leads Elenor to exclaim "I am no way, shape, or form a feminist". When probed about what being a feminist means, Elenor provides me with what I feel is a perfect explanation of Rural Feminism:

I'm very independent, as it goes. But I think [exhale] I think there's a lot of faith behind my opinion on it. Like, I am of the belief that we were created to be equals with men, but also, we have our separate roles. And so, I don't believe that men can't do anything for us, and I believe that there, I mean, we can... complement each other in ways that increases creativity in the ag industry and allows for different points of view because we're like, we weren't created the exact same for a reason. We all can bring different things to the table. But being, not being a feminist

to me just means that I'm not, I'm not shutting men out from being able to help me just because I think I can do it myself.

Patsy, as well as many of the other women farmers, concur either through verbal expressions or body language that feminism has a negative connotation for them. Many of the women farmers see feminism in an extreme lighting that is harsh and abrasive; not the type of relationship they want with other men farmers in the industry. Madison tells me "Yes, I'm proud to be a woman. I'm proud to be a woman in the agriculture industry that is predominantly dominated by men, and I'm not gonna back down...but I'm not gonna go to the extreme." Carmen, who was happily weighing 1,300-pound steers three days before giving birth, describes feminism as needing to have a balance. She remarks to me:

I ultimately think that women have the same rights as men. But just as much as a man needs to learn to listen to a woman, in a we'll say professional setting, a woman needs to learn to keep her mouth shut, too. So, I mean, it's a give and take.

This concept of Rural Feminism is new and still largely undefined. With future research on women farmers, it has potential to be sharpened. However, I conclude that Rural Feminism places an emphasis on the differences (biological, mental, physical, etc.) between men and women while also acknowledging the power of being a woman, and is influenced by religion, southern traditions, and what it means to be a woman farmer. Charlie describes women farmers as "people that have a beauty within the feminine side." In many ways, that aligns with the concept of Rural Feminism.

Outliers

There were three particular outliers in my sample. Kelly did not feel that her gender had an impact on her experiences in the agriculture industry, even though she felt the need to point it out during her interview for the university farm research position. She tells me:

You know, that's one reason I wanted to have this interview with you because I apparently don't have the traditional experience most females do. Because growing up, yes, I would say it was probably dominated by men, and even it might still be now, but I never had any issues as a female. When I showed up, I was willing to work and willing to listen. I was never treated any differently.

Even though Kelly claims she was never treated any differently, she was also able to tell me about her experience backing up a trailer and how she thought men offered her help more often because she was a woman.

Annie was also an outlier in this study. Annie was born and raised in Mexico in a German community and speaks four languages, although she has no formal education. She moved to the United States about ten years ago. Our interview took place as she was riding in the truck with her husband on the way to pick up farm parts. Overall, she felt like she wasn't treated any differently than men farmers, that there were no gender roles in the agriculture industry, and that religion and agriculture were not related. However, Annie is the women farmer who experienced discrimination when she was not employed on a Kansas farm because of her gender. Although Annie was an outlier in many ways, she had some similarities with the other women. For example, she has a strong relationship with a man in the industry, who encourages her as a woman farmer. When asked if there was anything she would change about being a woman in the agriculture industry, Annie tells me "I think I would just make it clear that this is not a man's job, only we have been handling it like that too much."

Charlie was the only Black women farmer who participated in this research. Charlie shares with me discrimination she has faced in the agriculture industry, though she is not sure if it is because of her race, gender, or a combination of both. This intersectionality of identities leaves Charlie with a different experience than the other women farmers. She tells me of an instance where she went into a feed store where she experienced some "pushback" because "they couldn't embrace me." Charlie goes on to tell me that:

[discrimination] is infused into the vein...it's more than the fiber of this country. It's too much. [sigh] I didn't think about ag because I'm thinking you have to eat, and there's food and whoever the hell is doing it, right? ...But I never expected ag, for some reason. How silly was I to think it couldn't be there, too? And it's, it's a fair amount unfortunately.

What Charlie is describing here is institutional and systematic racism, whether she notices it or not. While the farmers in this study may make light of some of the issues and discrimination that they face, there is no doubt that it is present in the production agriculture industry.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

What are the experiences of women farmers and the impact of their gender in production agriculture within the Southeastern United States? This research consisted of twelve in-depth interviews of women farmers. Using the Data Analysis Spiral provided by Creswell and Poth (2018), I was able to identify five subthemes, which led to one encompassing theme of Rural Feminism. Using difference feminist theory and labeling theory as a foundation to what I now call Rural Feminism, I was able to interview women farmers in the Southeastern United States about their experiences in the agriculture industry. In-depth interviews allowed researchers to gain valuable insight into the daily lives of women farmers. The implications of this research include conversations about diversity and inclusion in the agriculture industry, as well as fostering a greater sense of equality within the agriculture industry. Implications also include increasing equality in the agriculture industry through education, as well as providing more networking opportunities for women in agriculture, since they expressed the importance of “networking until your boots fall off.”

Rural Feminism

While Feminist Theory has many branches, this study uses a more specific approach of a term I call Rural Feminism. Rural Feminism can best be described as a type of feminism that is developed from difference feminism. Rural Feminism is a type of feminism held by rural women who acknowledge the biological and physical differences between men and women as well as the strengths and weaknesses of men and women. Rural Feminism is unique in that women do not identify as a feminist and believe that they can do anything a man can do while also holding to traditional conservative values found in the agriculture industry. This group of women view themselves as an asset to the work done in their agriculture sector (Beach, 2013), do not believe they are exploited by the agriculture industry (Sachs, 1983), do not adhere to feminist notions of oppression (Alan & Sachs, 2007), yet still experience inequality in the agriculture industry. Rural Feminism is unique in that not much research has been done on women in the agriculture industry outside of the traditional gender spectrum and the roles that go along with those identities (Kazyak, 2012; Contzen & Forney, 2017).

The Rural Feminist Perspective is a perspective that is often overlooked in the agriculture industry. Various articles talked about the idea of the women farmers’ perspective, but Chiappe and Butler Flora (1998) and Beach (2013) did so in the most compelling way of the mentioned studies. Beach’s (2013) article aimed to “analyze the portrayal of women’s roles in farming households”. She also discusses the point of view from a feminist perspective, looking into the agriculture industry and the

discourse of masculinization in the agriculture industry. Chiappe and Butler Flora (1998) interviewed twenty-five farm women in Minnesota. Interestingly, none of the farmers identified themselves as a feminist. Chiappe and Butler Flora (1998) were interested in examining the highly gendered nature of agriculture in the United States and in Canada by using the six Beus and Dunlap Elements. These elements include independence, decentralization, community, harmony with nature, diversity, and restraint. They found that it was important for women to be integrally involved in the agriculture paradigm as expressed by the narratives of the women interviewed. They also found that women had a “gendered location in the food system” and found that there were two more underlying elements that Beus and Dunlap (1990) did not seem to find: quality of life and spirituality (pg. 391). My study confirms the idea of spirituality or religiosity for women farmers in the Southeastern United States and helps to fill a gap on religion in the production agriculture industry. Spirituality is defined as “the quality or state of being spiritual” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Religion is defined as “a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). I would argue that religion, specifically Christianity, would be a more accurate element to add to the six Beus and Dunlap Elements because of the way Christianity is ingrained into the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of women farmers. For example, the belief that men and women farmers were created differently and with that comes different strengths and weaknesses.

Connection to Previous Literature

While Rural Feminism was a new concept that was found in this study, some of my findings related to the existing literature. Beach (2013) found in her research that women struggled to be identified as farmers and were often seen as a farm wife or farm helper. My research supports this claim. Many of the women farmers I spoke to discussed how instead of being addressed themselves, often another accompanying man (such as a husband, father, or uncle) would be addressed instead - even if that man knew little about the farm. The women of this study did not generalize men, even with there being a multitude of negative experiences. It is possible that women in this study felt overwhelmingly supported by paternal family members which led to a more positive outlook on their overall experiences. The farmers in this study also shared with me how many times others reacted in shock or disbelief when they called themselves a farmer.

Moreover, Contzen & Forney (2016) discuss the gender roles of women in the agriculture industry. While equality among gender is becoming more prevalent in the production agriculture industry, there seems to remain some gender roles. Many of the women mentioned secretarial roles, marketing roles, and social media roles as jobs done more often by women whereas men were more often to take on

physical tasks. However, the concept of gender roles in Rural Feminism is undefined in some ways. While the women of this study could identify these gender roles, they did not always identify *with* the roles.

Finally, there were issues of discrimination that were found in previous scholarship, specifically with the USDA around employment or funding. This was also relevant in my research. Some women discussed how they felt they were treated differently in USDA or FSA offices because of their gender, and that this may have led to a lack of funding or quality services. However, despite the negative experiences of women farmers, all the women in this study agreed that women in agriculture are growing in number.

Limitations

While there were many positive outcomes and aspects to this research, there were also some limitations. There was a lack of diversity in my sample size regarding race. All the research participants are White, with the exception of one farmer. Furthermore, there could be some lack of diversity in social status due to the requirement of having access to the internet and a computer to participate in this study. Another limitation to this study was the sample size. The sample size was relatively small and not generalizable to women farmers across the United States. Finally, the biggest limitation was having to do these interviews virtually. Many women expressed the desire for me to be able to visit their farms to truly capture their experiences. By having an observation component to this study, I would have had a clearer understanding of what these women do, who they work with, and how they operate their farms. I consider this to be the greatest weakness of my study.

This research adds to the literature in a variety of ways. First, by documenting the experiences of women farmers in the Southeastern United States. There are few studies that focus on the Bible Belt. In 1985, 53% of the farms operated primarily by women were in the south (Kalbacher, 1985). There are no statistics readily available today about the number of women farmers in the Southeastern United States. In fact, there is not much information known about farms operated by women besides very basic information, such as production type and sales (Hoppe & Korb, 2013). Second, this research fills a gap because women are typically beginner farmers (AFB, 2022). However, many of the farmers in this study were experienced farmers. This allows for a different perspective for women farmers.

Future Research

As I was completing this study, there were a couple of areas that would be worth exploring more. First, the idea of the second shift experienced by women farmers. Roughly a third of the participants in this study were mothers and two-thirds were married. Jessie specifically mentioned that on the farm,

women sometimes do all the things men are doing and then go home and do all the things a wife typically does for her home. She discusses how this can be intimidating for men and exhausting for women since they are engaging in so much physical labor. Understanding what it means to be a southern man or a southern woman may also help to further develop the concept of Rural Feminism. Elenor also talks about how motherhood could be harder in some ways, specifically pregnancy, because there isn't maternal leave for farmers. It's not realistic, and the labor done on the farm is often perceived as too rigorous for a woman who is in the third trimester.

Secondly, there needs to be more research done on Black women farmers. Charlie was the only Black woman farmer that I interviewed. She provided an interesting perspective of the intersectionality of being Black and being a woman farmer. While statistics about Black women farmers are not readily available, after crunching the numbers Lockhart (2021) estimates that Black women farmers make up less than 1% of farmers in the United States. If you refer to the findings discussed above, Charlie discusses how she is discriminated against, but is unsure if this is due to her race, gender, or a combination of the two. This would be worth further investigation and would be a great addition to the study of Rural Feminism.

Thirdly, there is very little research done about women farmers specifically in the Southeastern United States. However, the Southeastern states are heavily involved with the production agriculture industry. The southeastern state produces top commodities such as poultry, cotton, tobacco, blueberries, and dairy products (American Farm, 2022). Further, Georgia Southern University and other universities in the south should consider adding rural social sciences courses or programs. Adding programs or coursework about rural social sciences will increase the quality of rural life, expand the knowledge of general sociologists, and improve rural communities (Rural Sociological Society, 2017).

I have presented the idea and foundational qualities of Rural Feminism, which can be greater defined as research in this area progresses. While other rural sociological studies of similar interest have been completed, this one is one of the first focused on women farmers in the Southeastern United States. This study is also distinctive in recognizing a potential new branch of feminism: Rural Feminism.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT



COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Informed Consent
Experiences of Women Farmers in the Agriculture Industry

1. My name is Cassie Duncan. I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University with a Bachelor of Science in Sociology with a minor in Psychology. I am also currently enrolled in the Master of Arts in Social Sciences at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting this research study for my thesis entitled: Experiences of Women in the Agricultural Industry.
2. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to identify how women located in the Southeastern United States describe their participation in the agriculture industry. The goal of this research is to understand the difference in gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, etc. and other forms of intersectionality and how that impacts women who are employed in the agriculture industry.
3. Eligibility Requirements: There are a few requirements that participants (you) must meet in order to be eligible for this study. All participants (you) must be 18 years of age or older, identify as a woman, live and work in the Southeastern United States, read, speak and understand English, and have been involved in the agriculture industry for at least three years prior to the interview.
4. Procedures to be followed: Participation in this research will include completion of this informed consent form, signed, as well as at least one 60-to-90-minute interview. Participants (you) may be contacted again for further interviewing if necessary. The second interview will be no longer than an hour. All interviews will be done virtually over Zoom.
5. Discomforts and Risks: The risks of this study are minor and should not exceed feelings of discomfort or distress experienced in daily life experiences. By signing this form, you are stating that you understand that medical care is available in the event of injury resulting from research but that neither financial compensation nor free medical treatment is provided. Remember that you can stop this interview at any time as well as discontinue your participation. If attention is needed after or during this study the following resources are available to you:

Georgia Crisis and Access Line: 1-800-715-4225

Georgia Southern University Research Office: 912-478-5465

6. Privacy Policy: We are careful to ensure that the information you voluntarily provide to us is as secure as possible; however, you must be aware that transmissions over the Internet cannot be guaranteed to be completely secure. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology being used. You will be subject to the privacy policy of Zoom.
7. Benefits:
 - a. The benefits to you as a participant include being able to share your perspective of what it is like to be a woman in the agriculture industry in a safe and confidential environment.
 - b. The benefits to society include sharing knowledge about what women in the agriculture industry have in common, including hindrances and victories.
8. Duration/Time required from the participant: The interview that you will be participating in will take 60 to 90 minutes to complete. You may be contacted later for further interviewing that again will be no longer than one hour. All interviews will be done online over Zoom.
9. Statement of Confidentiality: The privacy of all participants in this study will be protected. I intend on keeping the recordings and accurate transcripts of the interviews. They will be kept in an unidentified name form. Recordings will be coded in a way that I, as well as my faculty advisor (Dr. April Schueths) will know which transcript/recording matches what participant. The codes will not be shared or published with anyone else besides those mentioned. This information will be kept in my Georgia Southern University Google Doc's account that is located on a Georgia Southern University laptop and/or in a locked filing cabinet that only I and my faculty advisor (Dr. April Schueths) will have access to.
10. Future use of data: The data collected will be maintained for future use in an deidentified fashion. Deidentified or coded data from this study may be placed in an available repository for study validation and further research. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
11. Right to Ask Questions: Participants (you) have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor (Dr. April Schueths), whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board at 912-478-5465.
12. Voluntary Participation: Participants (you) are not required by any means to participate in this study. You may end your participation at any time by telling the researcher. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. If this happens, please let the researcher know that you would like to skip the question asked or stop the interview.
13. Penalty: There is no penalty for stopping or discontinuing the interview. Participants may do so at any time by telling the researcher they no longer wish to participate.
14. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number **H22134**.

Title of Project: Experiences of Women Farmers in the Agriculture Industry

Principal Investigator: Cassie Duncan, Georgia Southern University, cc14629@georgiasouthern.edu

Research Advisor: Dr. April Schueths, Georgia Southern University, aschueths@georgiasouthern.edu

If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below:

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule

Interviewee Code: _____

Interviewer: Cassie Duncan (PI)

Date/Time/Location of Interview: _____

1. Consent and Introduction
 - a. Hello, my name is Cassie Duncan. I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University in the Master of Arts in Social Sciences program. I am conducting research for my thesis. I am interested in the participation of women in the agriculture industry, which will be what this interview is about.
 - a. I have several questions to go through, and this interview should take around 60 minutes to complete. Please let me know if you need a break at any time. Also, remember if you do not feel comfortable answering any questions you can tell me to skip the question or end the interview. Keep in mind there are no right or wrong answers.
 - b. Can you verify for me that you have read and agreed to the informed consent form that was emailed to you?
 - c. Do you have any questions before we begin?
2. We are going to begin the interview with a few basic demographic questions. The first one is what is your age?
3. What is your race or ethnicity?
4. What is your sexuality?
5. What is your highest education received?
6. What is your marital status?
7. What U.S state do you live and work in?
8. How many years have you been working or involved with the agriculture industry?
9. Were you raised on a family farm? Explain.
10. When you think of a farmer or someone who works in the agriculture industry, what image comes to mind? What characteristics or qualities does this person have?
11. Where are you employed? How long have you been working there?
12. What is it like working in the agriculture industry?

13. What is it like being a woman in the agriculture industry?
14. Do you think your gender affects your opportunities or chances in this industry? Why or Why not?
15. Would anything be different if you were a man in this industry instead? If so, what would be different?
16. Do you believe that men and women have different roles in the agriculture industry?
 - If yes, describe man's role versus woman's role
 - Where do you think these roles came from?
 - How do you feel about these roles?
17. Can you tell me more about your personal experiences with working with men in this industry?
18. Have you had an experience in the agriculture industry where you felt or were treated differently than your men coworkers? If so, tell me more about this experience.
19. Do you think your race affects your opportunities or chances in this industry? Why or why not?
20. Do you think your sexual orientation affects your opportunities or chances in this industry? Why or why not?
21. Is there anything that the agriculture industry - either broadly or specific to your area - can do to increase overall equality for those who work in this industry?
22. Do you believe there is anything that hinders women from working in the agriculture industry?
23. Where do you think the future of women in agriculture is headed?
 - Women more or less involved?
 - Why do you think this?
24. What agricultural areas would you like to see more women participate in?
25. Is there anything you would change about being a woman in the agriculture industry? If so, what would you change?
26. What does feminism mean or not mean to you?
27. Are religion and agriculture connected?
28. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel is important that we have not discussed?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I appreciate your input. It will allow us to understand more about the perspective of women in the agriculture industry. If you have any further questions about this project, the contact information for the primary investigator and advisor is included in the informed consent form that I provided for you. Have a great day.