



**Participation, Identity and Culture: an exploration of changing subjectivities through the life trajectories and social and work practices of selected farm women**

**Author**

Allan, Janet

**Published**

2008

**Thesis Type**

Thesis (PhD Doctorate)

**School**

School of Education and Professional Studies

**DOI**

[10.25904/1912/3770](https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/3770)

**Downloaded from**

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/367175>

**Griffith Research Online**

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

**PARTICIPATION, IDENTITY AND CULTURE:**

**AN EXPLORATION OF CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES  
THROUGH THE LIFE TRAJECTORIES, AND SOCIAL  
AND WORK PRACTICES OF SELECTED FARM  
WOMEN**

**Janet K Allan  
2007**

**PARTICIPATION, IDENTITY AND CULTURE:**

**AN EXPLORATION OF CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES  
THROUGH THE LIFE TRAJECTORIES, AND SOCIAL AND  
WORK PRACTICES OF SELECTED FARM WOMEN**

**Janet K Allan**

**MTchLn (Distinction)**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**October, 2007**

School of Education and Professional Studies  
Faculty of Education

**Griffith University**

## Abstract

This thesis explores the lives and experiences of farm women through identifying and elaborating their changing subjectivities as ‘farm wives’: a career entered through marriage rather than by vocational preference. It does this through using auto/ethnographic and ethnographic approaches in a study that engaged nine informants principally, but many more through its conduct. Importantly, the thesis gives voice and legitimacy to the place and dreams of women on farms and it has exposed silences that have been ‘a shelter for power’. This exposé has been a revelation to those farming women and men who have lived secluded, private lives furiously protecting a myth of the farm ‘wife’ as fulfilled and happy while living life vicariously, largely through her husband’s achievements. Issues of power, gender, isolation and entrapment are revealed through advancing issues of subjective change within a zealous and often unforgiving culture where the myth and propaganda do not match the realities of these women’s lives. Maintaining self and maintaining culture far from being manifested as times of stability, require some volatility as they both command transformative and, sometimes, contradictory change to sustain the woman’s humanness while ensuring the sustainability of the New Zealand icon – the family farm. Central to the resolution of how farming women sustain and transform their ‘selves’, are their capacities for intentionality, agency and empowerment. An ability to negotiate or renegotiate a life for one’s ‘self’ is entangled in the complex web of relations between farm, work, family and culture. While influenced by personal intent and agency, this sense of self is informed by one’s personal history. Intentionality, then, is a critical concept to consider in attempting to isolate motivational drives; in seeking resolution for such dilemmas. Intention comprises individual agency exercised as personal choice, as opposed to social agency constrained in the form of pressure to conform and meet cultural expectations. However, many of these women have difficulty isolating personal intention due to social and cultural intent dominating their thinking and actions to a point where they sub-consciously take ownership of those objectives. It seems from the participating women, though, that a drive for self-knowledge is compelling.

Advanced here is an elaboration of how these ‘farm wives’ negotiated, reconstructed and reshaped their sense of self, and, at times, also strongly resisted and dis-identified with the social world in which they found themselves unwittingly, and at times unwillingly embedded. Calls are made for challenging and changing cultural expectations while prioritising women’s needs. Key contributions concern the salience of: (1) the central role of ‘becoming’ and ‘belonging’ as a function of managing geographical, psychosocial, financial, emotional, intellectual and genderised isolations, along with negotiating a culture of masculinisation; (2) maintenance of self existing as a function of a sense of belonging, without which maintenance is elusive and issues of entrapment often manifest as matriarchal power and control between competing generations of women; (3) maintenance and transformation of one’s ‘self’ critically requiring strength of personal agency; and (4) the negotiations of women who continue to defy the norms, reasserting resistance while negotiating ‘self’ and in doing so transform both their ‘self’ and their culture. Needs for further enquiry are raised regarding: the cultural relationships between patriarchy and matriarchy and ensuing entrapments; the cultural lag of farming culture in regard to feminist change; and the sustainability of individuals struggling to ‘belong’ to a culture not of their choosing.

Saliently, this research has resonated with New Zealand farming women of all ages and also with young farming men who are struggling with the resistance of young women to marry onto farms. The response, while challenging, indicates strong relevance and critical need.

**Keywords:** farm women, subjectivity, self, identity, agency, intent, social, gender, power, control, patriarchy, matriarchy, isolations, entrapment, becoming, belonging, maintenance, transformation, culture, resistance, masculinisation, social inclusiveness or exclusiveness, choice, silencing, policing, feminism, ethnography, narrative

## **Statement of Originality**

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

**Signed:**

## Acknowledgements

A little over four years have been expended in this PhD research project. A time during which life has had many twists and turns. The first two years were remarkably unremarkable and the research process very enjoyable. But the last 2.5 years have been challenging in many ways. James (son) has successfully fought a very challenging cancer of the tongue; a brutal reminder of the preciousness of life. Concurrently, Tom (husband) challenged my coping skills by being struck down with Legionnaires Disease, again beating the odds. Daniel, Rachel, Reuben, Kate and Kris and many others were major sources of support amongst all this.

On a brighter note, two precious grandsons were born -Tom 2½ years old and Ben 5 months old - both of whom are reaping the best genes from both sides of their heritage. Along with these milestones, farming and associated business commitments (including major issues with Transpower NZ Ltd), unplanned media and public attention (in regard to this research) and the building of a new house have all been demanding and time consuming. So it is with some relief and satisfaction that I complete this amazing and challenging journey. Truly, for me it has been a transformative personal odyssey.

Obviously many people have contributed to this completion:

- ❑ On a personal note, particularly extended family, friends and interested people.
- ❑ Also, farming men and women, who have responded to the media attention this research attracted, by phoning, writing and emailing me with words of support and appreciation for opening up their worlds and exposing their silent realities. This support has been invaluable.
- ❑ Particular thanks go to the nine women who played major roles through sharing their most intimate lives and secrets which enabled production of an account that is as close to the truth as possible. This is their contribution to their social worlds, to their mix of cultures and to their courageous 'selves'.
- ❑ Other women (and men), who participated through the extensive ethnographic component, have likewise contributed to possibly instigating change in a very traditional and conservative culture.
- ❑ Dr. Maureen Doherty has accompanied me on my academic ride for a number of years and as my external supervisor for this PhD project has added invaluable knowledge, support and friendship along with much needed social contact. Though meeting 'on the road' we have had numerous interesting, soul searching discussions in many cafes and restaurants in many small towns in Canterbury and Otago. At times, in latter months, she has kept me sane by her ready and rational responses.
- ❑ Dr. Maree Boyle, my associate supervisor, while coming onto the team later in the piece has proven to be a crucial and valued addition. Her clear precise responses and advice with added personal support have been greatly appreciated. Maree's help with the submission process has been invaluable.
- ❑ Jill Ryan was also a latter but crucial member of the team assisting with proof reading. Her editorial efficiencies and her knowledge of APA and other related points have been most impressive. I am grateful for her ready help and timely responses.
- ❑ Pita Alexander (Farm Accountant) for his generosity in contributing \$3,000 towards my PhD cost – a show of faith and trust in my abilities and in recognition of the value of the subject matter.
- ❑ Finally, an immense vote of thanks must go to Dr Stephen Billett for his major contribution as my principal supervisor. Because I have worked remotely and by distance, while isolated mostly from an academic community, Stephen has been

the rock on which this research stands. His dedication, along with his depth of knowledge and ready responses, has been very impressive and greatly appreciated. He has gone well beyond merely doing a job and has invested personal time, effort and support. Through Stephen, in addition to the thesis, I have had the opportunity to publish chapters in two edited books (Appendix 3), which is an added bonus and a source of personal pride. So, my thanks go to him (along with the other editors) for that generosity and confidence.

Here now, joining with all these people and many others too many to mention, I present the thesis bearing in mind Van Maanen's words:

*"I simply don't believe that there is any such notion of the crucial experiment or pathbreaking study in the social sciences – each work is connected to a larger body (both the authors and the fields) [and I add, the people] and the cumulative effect of a stream of work, or development of a theory circle that influences the field, not a single work and certainly not a single article"* (cited Frost & Stablein, 1992, p. 288).

My hope is that many lives are enriched by the knowledge built on many others' work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Statement of originality	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	vi
List of Appendixes	xiv
List of Figures	xiv
<b>1 FARM WOMEN, IDENTITY FORMATION, CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION</b>	<b>1</b>
Integrating work, life and identity .....	2
Understanding everyday life and power relationships within farming couples .....	3
Changing conceptions of ‘farm wives’, farm work and women’s identity ..	4
Farm women; Negotiating subjectivity, identity and culture .....	6
Investigating farm women’s sense of identity: A methodological orientation .....	8
Investigating farm women’s changing subjectivities: Research design, method and analyses .....	9
Surprising, challenging and very public dissemination of emerging findings – media exposure .....	9
‘Becoming’ and ‘belonging’ as contestation, subjugation and resistance within power and gender relations .....	12

Relationships between maintaining ‘self’ and maintaining culture within marriage, family, work-roles and community .....	13
Transforming self and culture – changing subjectivities through arduous personal odysseys .....	14
Women have dreams too, you know? Changing subjectivities, a summative discourse of self .....	15
Key contributions and needs for further inquiry .....	17
<b>2 CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF ‘FARM WIVES’, FARM WORK AND WOMEN’S IDENTITY</b>	<b>19</b>
Conceptions of farm women in New Zealand .....	20
Self and agency: Relationships to culture and change .....	23
Feminism and farm women: Not an easy relationship .....	25
Farm household work as farmwork .....	27
Women’s role in changing cultural expectations in farming worlds .....	28
Individual or social agency – influences towards generational change .....	31
History-in-person: Influencing formation, reformation and transformation of ‘self’ .....	34
Cognition and culture: Challenge, stimulation and care of self .....	36
Place of relationships in culture, learning and subjectivity .....	38
<b>3 FARM WOMEN: NEGOTIATING SUBJECTIVITY, IDENTITY AND CULTURE</b>	<b>41</b>
Farm women: Subjectivity, identity and culture .....	42
Private and public worlds: Partnership or incorporation .....	44

Co-preneur couples as comparison with farming couples and dual-career couples .....	46
Farm women and their sense of personal fulfilment .....	48
Farm women's subjectivity, identity and sense of self .....	49
Women, identity and work: learning as everyday activity .....	51
Farm women and 'place' .....	53
Combining cultural sentiments and expectations within identity: a tangle of tensions .....	55
Invisibility and alienation silencing 'self' .....	59
Purposes for enquiry .....	60
Research focus .....	63
<b>4 INVESTIGATING FARM WOMEN'S SENSE OF IDENTITY: A METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION</b>	<b>65</b>
Facing the dilemma of 'how': Including researcher as subject .....	65
Different views of auto/ethnography .....	67
To analyse or not: A question of objectivity .....	68
A feminist ethnography .....	70
Questioning feminist methodology .....	72
Sociocultural influences on subjectivity .....	74
Capturing data from life stories .....	74
Auto/ethnographic participant observations within the rural setting in which I live and work .....	76
Ethnographic interviews of the selected farm women as participants .....	77
Conclusion .....	79

<b>5</b>	<b>INVESTIGATING FARM WOMEN’S CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHOD AND ANALYSES</b>	<b>81</b>
	Investigating farm women’s changing subjectivities .....	81
	<b>Section 1: Research design</b>	<b>82</b>
	A flexible design interacting with emerging data and theory .....	82
	Selection of participants .....	84
	Case studies with ethnographic interviews and observations .....	87
	Value of focused probing .....	88
	Feedback interviews and member validation .....	89
	Transcriptions of interviews, observations and other field work .....	90
	Documenting process of data analysis and theory building .....	91
	Analysis of data .....	92
	Emergent theory grounded in data .....	93
	<b>Section 2: Strengths and limits of the research design: A discussion on validity and reliability</b>	<b>94</b>
	Multiple sources of evidence converging in conclusion: (Figure 2) .....	95
	Incorporating media attention, dissemination and the aftermath .....	97
	Recognising and sustaining credibility .....	98
	Limiting factors to the research design .....	100
	Possibilities of bias .....	101
	Ethical considerations and avoiding potential dilemmas .....	101
	Ethical Issues and dilemmas faced .....	103
	Conclusion .....	105

<b>6</b>	<b>BECOMING' AND 'BELONGING' AS CONTESTATION, SUBJUGATION AND RESISTANCE WITHIN POWER AND GENDER RELATIONS</b>	<b>107</b>
	Becoming and belonging: farm wives' journeys .....	107
	Issues of 'becoming' within entanglements .....	109
	<b>Section 1: Ethnographies of 'becoming' and 'belonging'</b>	<b>110</b>
	'Becoming' part of a new or known culture .....	111
	<i>Women's place in the rural idyll</i> .....	113
	'Becoming' as an act of trust .....	115
	<i>Lack of city girls attracted to farming/farmers</i> .....	116
	Generational difference: growing resistance .....	117
	Division of labour: reproduced through 'apprenticeship' .....	118
	'Reserve army', alienation and isolations .....	120
	Mothering: keeping busy but lacking esteem .....	121
	The place of food in farm women's identities .....	123
	Different cohorts, different expectations .....	124
	Financial isolation in a profit-driven business .....	126
	<b>Section 2: Becoming and belonging within complex power and gender relations</b>	<b>129</b>
	Masculinities, femininities and women's work .....	130
	<i>Not too male, not too female – the third sex and 'knowing'</i> .....	131
	Strong need for 'self': A source of conflict .....	134
	<i>Challenging perceptions – a disillusionment</i> .....	135

Farm marriage, patriarchy and the extended farming family .....	137
<i>Matriarchal mentorship</i> .....	138
<i>Matriarchal power and dominance</i> .....	139
Struggling for identity in extended farm families .....	141
Contributing to patriarchal knowledge .....	143
‘Belonging’, ‘becoming’ and culture - Early days and socialisation through work .....	145
<i>Identifying through community</i> .....	147
Sense of belonging: social inclusiveness or exclusiveness .....	148
<i>The chocolate cake experience</i> .....	149
<i>Born to the job – a different burden</i> .....	150
Conclusion: Becoming a farmer’s wife: contestation, subjugation and resistance .....	151
<b>7 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MAINTAINING ‘SELF’ AND MAINTAINING CULTURE WITHIN MARRIAGE, FAMILY, WORK-ROLES AND COMMUNITY</b>	<b>155</b>
Farm women’s maintenance of self .....	155
Integrating work, life and identity .....	156
<i>Historical expectations versus reality</i> .....	157
<b>Section 1: Ethnographies of maintaining self and culture</b>	<b>158</b>
Identifying through career, work or relationships .....	159
Identifying through children – children as a career .....	161
Working outside on the farm – partial participation .....	165
Decision-making: issues of power and knowledge .....	167

Careers - childcare, farmwork and helping but is it empowering? .....	168
Resistance or capitulation: self-maintenance or self-preservation .....	168
The place of husbands in farm-marriages and farm-life .....	172
<i>Generational differences</i> .....	174
<i>The place of the marriage relationship</i> .....	176
Family power and control: Summary .....	177
Issues of power, gender and isolation .....	178
<i>Issues of self maintenance</i> .....	180
The place of rural women's groups in maintaining self through community .....	181
Work and health: Constructing and reconstructing identities .....	185
<i>Fitting the mould or breaking it – a challenge among women</i> .....	185
<i>Suppression, repression or depression - work and health</i> .....	188
<b>Section 2: Maintaining self: Negotiation, choice,                   entrapment and power</b> .....	<b>190</b>
Identity regulation through cultural pressures and expectations .....	190
<i>The reality or myth of 'choice' and its consequences</i> .....	193
<i>Mystory of maintenance</i> .....	195
Conclusion: The elusive engagement of maintenance .....	197
 <b>8 TRANSFORMING SELF AND CULTURE – CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES THROUGH ARDUOUS PERSONAL ODYSSEYS</b> .....	 <b>201</b>
Transforming self and culture .....	202
Transformation as contesting 'self' .....	203

Individual stories of personal struggles towards transformative change .....	204
Sarah – 35 years old, rural-town raised .....	204
Anne – 50 years old, rural-town raised .....	208
Louise – 35 years old, farm daughter, raised on a farm .....	212
Bronwyn – 48 years old, raised in a large European city .....	217
Kate – 49 years old, raised on dairy farm .....	222
Helen – 47 years old, raised on a large sheep and beef farm .....	225
Contesting ‘possible selves’ – negotiable or not .....	228
A drive for knowledge .....	230
Conclusions: women’s stories of transforming selves .....	233
<b>9 WOMEN HAVE DREAMS TOO, YOU KNOW?</b>	
<b>CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES, A SUMMATIVE</b>	
<b>DISCOURSE OF SELF</b>	<b>235</b>
Farm women and their subjective change .....	236
Becoming, belonging and being a farm wife .....	237
Adaptation and relationships to agency .....	239
Maintenance: tension of self and culture .....	241
Women inadvertently maintaining patriarchal power and control .....	242
Relationships among identity, self, structure and agency .....	243
Contesting ‘possible selves’ – negotiable or not .....	245
A drive for knowledge .....	247
Conclusion: Changing cultural expectations .....	248
Key contributions .....	249
<b>References</b> .....	<b>251</b>

## List of Appendixes

<b>Appendix 1</b>	Example interview guide for semi-structured open interviews	272
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Media interviews, print articles, radio and television	275
<b>Appendix 3</b>	List of publications and presentations during candidacy	278

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1</b>	A non-exclusive sample of the process of analysis of data, to emergent theory .....	92
<b>Figure 2</b>	Convergence of multiple sources of evidence to comparative conclusions .....	96

## CHAPTER ONE

### FARM WOMEN, IDENTITY FORMATION, CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION

*But the farming thing ... If only you'd been valued a bit more, you know, because the farm was part of our life and we very rarely got away from it ... But I always felt on the outer ... The farm partnership was his mother, his father, his brother and him ... Men do their days work farming and then they switch off. Whereas women - I found that I was out there every day doing it and then, at night I was coming home doing the motherly, wifely thing as well and not valued or appreciated. (Louise)*

This dissertation explores and elaborates the transforming lives and subjectivities of a range of New Zealand farm women. The aim is to identify their 'place' and experiences of 'self' as women who entered a set of relationships, lifestyle, workplace and culture, through marriage rather than through individual choice. An open and informed account of the role and place of farming women is essential to fully understand farming families, farm life and farming communities, and their prospects for continuity. This continuity is particularly important when changes to farming and rural communities stand to threaten these communities' prospect for survival. The traditional family farm relies heavily on the 'farm wife' and her many roles, for its very existence and its viability. Yet, these women's roles are often taken for granted, without their full contributions and the impact of rural life on these women being understood, let alone acknowledged. Here, the experiences and changes in subjectivity of farming women are learnt about from the women themselves. In an earlier study (Allan, 2005a), the 'place of' and 'value of' farm women (farmers' wives), in a farming operation, was repeatedly described by the men as one of 'helper' and 'sounding board'. Yet, these terms fail to empower the women or endow them with anything more than partial and peripheral participation. Moreover, from the farming women who participated in this current research, it has been found that although they have typically entered farming through marriage rather than personal choice, different and distinct patterns of women's subjectivities emerge through their negotiations of becoming and being a farmer's wife. A view arises of hardworking women who toil to support their farm and families in their many roles with little time left for self. For some, often due to emotional exhaustion, their sense of selves as

farming women cannot be maintained over time. Yet, it seems that the ongoing negotiation of tensions in their everyday life can shape both their continuity and transformative journeys to selfhood.

The terms 'farm wife', 'farmer's wife' and farm woman are used intentionally here in various contexts. Although initially the intention was to use the term 'farm woman', it became clear that the public included all women on farms in this term. To differentiate from women who have chosen to farm in their own right (not through marriage) and also 'life-stylers' (i.e. small-farm owners), the terms farm(er's) wives are used not exclusively, but more than was initially intended. The relation with the other (i.e. the farmer) is central to much of what is advanced here.

### **Integrating work, life and identity**

The challenge for farm women is to negotiate an integration of work, life and identity often within the environs of the social structures they participate in, which arise through marriage to a farmer. As a farm woman of more than thirty years, I found the lack of recognition of the farm women's contributions that emerged in the earlier study (i.e. Allan, 2005a) disconcerting. I realised that I had little idea what was happening in the lives of other farm women 'out there', even those locally. I certainly knew I was more than a 'helper' and 'sounding board' and suspected many (or most) other farm women were also. Burning questions arose of "What is happening to the sense of self and identity of all those women out there on farms, whose contributions likely go beyond those used to describe them (i.e. as sounding boards and helpers)?" "How are they maintaining their 'selves' as individual persons?" and "how are they transforming their selves over time?" It was this concern that motivated the present study.

Farming culture in New Zealand, though, has strong traditions. These include a history of the hardworking, domesticated and resourceful woman 'standing by her man' and supporting him in his work. While one might expect that this attitude has been subject to change and there might be an expectation that women would now be valued more comprehensively and overtly, this doesn't appear to be the case. The women I have spoken to both as case studies, and also through ethnographic and everyday activities in farming communities, tell a different story. An earlier study, investigating the lives of farming men (Allan, 2005a), included insights into what can

happen when a farmer's son decides to farm because of family expectations, out of loyalty or as an easy option. It seems that such a lack of purpose, personal ownership, freedom and individual choice in their farming career can limit a farmer's ability to innovate and succeed, especially in times of adversity. This finding suggests the need to understand the circumstances for farm women who farm as a result of marrying a farmer, and over time come to experience the often burdensome impositions associated with farming life and its work. Rural culture and its expectations are difficult to challenge, as many of the women have found to their detriment.

The evidence about farming women's sense of self emerging from this study is confronting and disturbing, even for someone like myself who has been in farming for such a long time. I have been quite shocked by the degree of unhappiness and depression that has exuded from the farm women's stories. Some are aggressive and angry, "I told him, 'if you want to feed them you do it yourself, I'm going out and finding a life for myself.'" Others are more subversive while yet others are almost submissive. Yet, there is a yearning for their stories to be told. "Fascinating" is the word most commonly used by farm women who ask about my study and although not wanting to say it too loudly or openly, they are interested and pleased to learn that 'their' story, or that of their mother, is not isolated and that their reality is being given a voice.

### **Understanding everyday life and power relationships within farming couples**

This is a study of women, who are farming not through choice but through marriage. It focuses on issues of identity and self in relation to work, life and learning and the difficult struggles, often, of women life-partners, to develop a strong sense of self. In order to understand the unique links of subjectivity to the land, to family, to community, to gender relations and to the cultural history of farming, my research focuses strongly on the changing subjectivities of farming women (Allan, 2005b). While I make some comparisons and seek some relationships to my earlier study of male farmers, (Allan, 2005a) and note contributions of and reactions to this research by farming men, my focus here is on the lives and experiences of farming women, like myself. Knowing how identities are initially formed, continue over time and transform, is critical to understanding farm-life and its unique workplace culture as it is experienced in reality.

From these studies, identity (i.e. the public self) is held to be strongly socially and culturally influenced, while the person's subjectivity (i.e. their inner self) is more personal, although embedded in their social histories. Many of the women who fall into the roles expected of them as 'farmers' wives', like those farmers' sons who struggle with success in farming, strongly identify with the expected and often rigid behaviour of the historical cultural-norms. Other women though are forced to challenge these norms due to the conflict between how they know themselves (i.e. subjectivity) and how they experience their 'self' through others (i.e. identity) in their everyday rural life. Through living and working on a farm as a consequence of marriage, learning and a changing sense of self are often a point of conflict and turmoil between the social world and human agency. The first chapter, then, introduces and foreshadows this complex study. It introduces the reader to the structure, content and findings of this research. And it briefly outlines the subsequent reaction to the findings of this research into a sector of New Zealand society that has historically been presumed to be coping and 'happy with their lot'. Hard work, it was thought, made them different from urban women and so the 'suburbia neurosis' of the 1970s feminist revolt was not recognised as having a place in rurality. From these women's experiences it seems that "voice is an indicator of self" (Jack, 1993, p. 32) and loss of voice is reflective of loss of self. Therefore, voicing one's inner thoughts, feelings and possibilities is an intrinsic part of 'becoming' and belonging to a new culture while seeking to maintain and reinvent one's known self. From this viewpoint the ability to hear oneself is critical to sustaining one's subjective self. Consequently, the wider a gap protruding between one's personal inward self and the outward presented identity, the more likely and more oppressive the feelings of being inauthentic and incongruous may become. Thus situated identities may bury the authentic self.

### **Changing conceptions of 'farm wives', farm work and women's identity**

Chapters Two and Three evolve from a review of literature supported by practical examples and vignettes from early data. A case is made for researching farm women, their identity, place, agency and trajectories of self, within experiences of rural culture. Subsequent points of deduction from the argument are assembled into a

coherent conceptual position for researching the subjectivities of selected farm women, through their personal histories and over time. In doing so, Chapter Two outlines the more general conceptual and methodological position using instances from farm-life and farm work while Chapter Three focuses more tightly on the farm women, themselves, negotiating subjectivity, identity and cultural change.

In making a contribution, towards understanding the sense-making of these farm women's lives and experiences, the current knowledge of changing subjectivities and transforming 'sense of self' within cultural experience is augmented. The role of cultural expectations and their influence in both affording and constraining a person's ability to form, maintain and transform their subjectivity is not well understood. It is recognised, though, that new meanings need to be constructed regarding a 'sense of self' and about how this 'sense of self' is maintained and transformed throughout life's experiences (Holland & Lave, 2001a). New understandings of relationships between and through individual, social and cultural inclusion or exclusion are obligated. While farming men have choice in their career, albeit sometimes tempered by family expectations, the women are led by an emotional decision (i.e. marriage) not directly related to their life's work or workplace.

Certainly, this study contributes to a growing field of inquiry about farm women. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing interest in the place, role, recognition and visibility of farm women, internationally (e.g. Alston, 1998a; Carbert, 1995; O'Hara, 1998; Sachs, 1996; Shortall, 1999; Whatmore, 1991a). From my perspective though, it is not a question of how labour is divided or who has the power or high profiles in farming politics, it is more a question of how women on farms are experiencing their lives. What changes have they made to their 'self' in 'becoming' a 'farmer's wife'? How have they maintained their 'self'? And how have they transformed their 'self' over time? This research seeks to understand the reality of farm women as participants, their sense of fulfilment or otherwise and their contribution to society, as well as to their own wellbeing.

This sense of wellbeing seems influenced strongly by conflict between the woman's sense of self, or how she sees herself *personally*, and the sense of identity that is imposed on her socially. Although at any one time such a subjective sense of self relates to the inherent nature of the woman as a dynamic organism, this known self is constantly changing, sometimes subtly but at times more boldly, resulting in

significant trauma and major change. Insight into these processes is sought through analyses of the women's experiences and knowledge of self, social and other.

### **Farm women; Negotiating subjectivity, identity and culture**

Power relations are intrinsic to understanding the ability to enact personal agency within such a dominant culture. It seems that farm women's sense of self is captured by their dominating role as a 'farm wife'. Their 'self,' as an individual, may be dominated to a point of non-recognition by their roles within their life partnership (e.g. marriage), their farming responsibilities and cultural expectations. Understanding how women have coped with this overwhelming absorption of 'self', is vital to the well-being of farm women. Likewise, it is crucial to the future of family farming, considering the intrinsic role played by women and their importance to the success of such farming enterprises (Allan, 2002). Extensive ethnographic participation and observation of farming life and culture add many layers to the understanding and validation of individual women's stories. While many theorists see power as a base for inequality of status and value, there is debate regarding the source and expression of such power. Some like O'Hara (1998, p. 153) see farm women as social actors shaping their own worlds; as "active agents in shaping the world around them", within their specific culture. This view considers personal power to be socially mediated. Cultural power with less agentic influence, though, is central to Shortall's (1999) claim that "farming culture affords men more power than women, [and that] central to this is access to property" (p. 2). Rather than property particularly, which in many cases is shared legally as matrimonial effects, this current research identifies major decision making within farm and financial management, to be the critical point of power. Such decision-making is not only energising it can be the major source of authority and influence, which if not shared legitimately, is divisive and a source of conflict and tension. This dominance often divorces the women from status, power and value, resulting in personal detachment from both their personal and business partnerships. Indeed, O'Hara's (1998) conclusion that farm 'wives'' declining involvement in the family enterprise alters the nature of family farming, seems to be precise. She observes that farm women "strongly constrained by patriarchal family relations in the labour process and within the farm family, try to construct a future for their daughters in which the cycles of dependent wives will be fractured" (p. 161).

This, she predicts, will allow the next generation of women to exercise a vast array of choices. Thus, farm women as mothers will “exert the greatest influence on the future of family farming” through socialisation and education.

My research while confirming O’Hara’s intergenerational observations critically identifies the older generation often constraining and restraining younger farm women due to their subconscious feelings of entrapment. The subsequent lack of choice, so deeply embedded, seems to be critical to the women’s sense of wellness and their mental health in particular. Without recognising this, though, the older generation of farm women can become embittered. They feel threatened by the challenges of younger women seeking change, negotiating for self and increasingly resisting ‘becoming’ farm women. Moreover, women’s attitudes to farming are intergenerational with mothers influencing their daughters’ life trajectories both in education and career choices. These choices, in turn, influence other options. While influence may be for or against a particular choice, this suggests that individual choice is socially agented. This study seeks to add to our understanding of such relationships, and possible points of intersection, through exploring the experiences of both farm women raised on farms and those urban women who subsequently became new entrants to the culture thereby incorporating their earlier experiences into their transforming selves. It may be that a generation of in-migrant ‘farm wives’ are influencing the roles of young women due to the inter-cultural vision of their subjectivities. Or it may be that factors requiring urban living, like tertiary education and training, influence both urban and rural women, thus changing visions of ‘possible selves’. All these concepts are emerging through data analysis of the women’s life histories.

Through a ‘history-in-person’ approach (Holland & Lave, 2001a), this cultural study of farm women focuses on their experiences and processes of ‘becoming’, and their developing subjectivities through discourse and embodiments within their worlds. It explores how through their life challenges as ‘farm wives’, they transform their role and their culture while at the same time transforming (or being transformed) themselves. Subjectivity is seen, then, as a fluid phenomenon influenced by one’s positionality and inter-related to cultural and contextual factors. Formation, maintenance and transformation of the ‘self’ are influenced by people and place including a person’s workplace. Because farm women are often seen as merely helpers in their workplace (R. Smith, 1991b), such positionality may influence a

vacuum within women's confused sense of selves. It seems that such a vacuum becomes more apparent as the importance of their child care role diminishes. This then leads to women accepting or actively seeking new roles to add-value to their sense of self.

### **Investigating farm women's sense of identity: A methodological orientation**

Chapter Four advances an orientation to investigating farm women's sense of self using auto/ethnographic and ethnographic approaches. It holds that the researcher's experiences as a farm woman both shapes and, importantly, contributes to the selection of methodology in order to investigate the lives, senses of self and transitions of farm women. The term auto/ethnographic (with the forward slash) is used throughout this text to denote a symbiosis of my personal involvement with that of wider ethnography (Stanley, 1992). Other variations are used at times, though, in referring to other authors' terms. This chapter comprises an account of deliberation about the selected methodological perspectives and approach to the research, which are presented as an orientation to what is detailed in the next chapter (Chapter Five). Viewpoints that both support and challenge the use of a feminist perspective are discussed, while deliberations on the merits of using auto/ethnography as the key method are also made. The chapter also justifies the practical methods of how the research was conducted. Approaches engaged throughout, are those associated with auto/ethnography, personal histories, interviews and feminist methodology. These extend to the case for participant selection, ethical considerations and potential personal dilemmas of 'researcher as subject'. Thus, orientations regarding feminist methodology, auto/ethnography and histories-in-person are advanced here. The following chapter (Five) focuses more on detail of research design, recognition and sustainability of credibility, along with a discussion on the strengths and limitations of the research.

Feminist methodology is incorporated with auto/ethnography as a means of inquiry, with both methods empowering the subjectivity of the knower rather than relegating them to an abstract position (D. E. Smith, 1999). That is, the woman's space and experience are legitimised as having value in their own right. 'Researcher as subject' and a more subjective relationship between the researcher and other participants, is reflective of both genres. The viewpoint of women is used (Stanley &

Wise, 1993), to recognise the value of a person's history as its influence on the present (Roberts, 2002). This is pertinent when seeking to understand women's experience, despite the fact that few of the women involved would readily identify as feminists. Active partnerships are sought with participants in interpreting and creating meaning about their life experiences (Roberts, 2002). Throughout this thesis, my story - through my life and work on-farm and within rural culture in partnership with my husband - is identified alongside other women's. My daily experiences, observations, discourse and cultural participation though, give way to the courage of those other women who so generously and courageously told their stories.

### **Investigating farm women's changing subjectivities: Research design, method and analyses**

The practical issues of this research, its analysis and the methods used, are outlined in Chapter Five, which documents the surprising, challenging and very public dissemination of emerging findings. Multiple, detailed and lengthy interviews were conducted with selected cases while I myself was fully participant through personally living and working on-farm. I also attended farming field-days, seminars and other activities and was critically observant of my own situation and that of others while participating in a range of discourses in my everyday working and social life. While I conducted in-depth and repeated interviews with nine women as major participants, I also spoke in-depth with an extended number of women. Combined with this level of engagement, my life-work and work-life involvement expanded access to a multitude of other participants through everyday ethnographic fieldwork. These interactions became a dominant factor in investigating persons within rural culture. Chapter Five further develops the case for rigor in design, methods, data generation, analyses and emerging theory. Recognition and sustainability of credible research is advanced in relation to the validity and reliability of data, its analysis and interpretation. Strengths and limitations of the research design are outlined while arguments for and against the place of validity and reliability in qualitative research are sought. It also documents the surprising, challenging and very public dissemination of emerging findings.

### **Surprising, challenging and very public dissemination of emerging findings – media exposure**

Here, unsolicited and very surprising public media exposure is documented in narration, supported by references of a selection of publications and presentations (Appendix 2) which give some indication of the extent of this public attention. I have chosen to document this phenomenon here, in the introductory section of the thesis, as it seems intrinsically relevant to so many aspects of the research and its findings.

From a chance discussion on my research at our own 'Farm Discussion Group', (i.e. a peer-support process common in the professional development of New Zealand farmers), my research became high profile in the media. With that initial brief set of comments on our own farm, (where I outlined what had been occupying my time, other than farming) the farmers in the group were astounded at my emerging findings. The sense of personal void in the lives of these participating farm women, their lack of fulfilment and the reluctance of young women to take up this life, while quite shocking also hit an unacknowledged accord with them. Their somewhat stunned response reflected, 'this is my wife you're talking about' or as one farmer said, "you are not going to tell us if you've been talking to our wives are you?" While this was said somewhat in jest, the message was serious. While no other women were present, one farm woman told me later of her son and husband returning home and telling her about it with enthusiasm but astonishment. As she said, "Bells were going off in my head."

From there I spoke at a Provincial Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Federated Farmers group with the result that, while one man was scathing and aggressive, another young man was tearful and others responded with personal stories like "now I better understand where my wife is coming from ...". This, combined with the reaction of the women interviewed where four of the first five women were tearful telling their stories, made me realise that this was 'big'. I became very aware of the responsibilities both personally and ethically that this research encompassed. The gravity, weightiness and possible consequences of the research ensured an acute need for validity. It was with this in mind that I sought to prove my findings wrong by pursuing these emerging issues through in-depth discussions with a large number of farming women and men in the field. But far from negating the findings, these issues were constantly and consistently confirmed. I had realised that it was confronting, challenging and potentially far-reaching, but I wasn't prepared for the reaction through the media which broke as a result of speaking at the Federated Farmers Regional AGM.

I appeared in all forms of media, on primetime TV, primetime national radio, a full range of print media. I spoke at a range of mostly rural large meetings, AGMs, and Conferences. (A sample of these is included as Appendix 2.) It became clear that my study could be seminal in exploding a range of myths of a deeply embedded icon of New Zealand culture – the family farm and particularly that comfortable icon of the ‘farmer’s wife’. While the responsibility seemed enormous and overpowering, I had no real option but to front up and present my emerging findings. By far the most common reaction was “thank goodness someone has exposed this”, to “what you have found is just the tip of an iceberg”, to “thank you for doing this”. Farm women sought me out by phone and email, leaving me personal stories and supportive messages. Repeatedly they confirmed the findings.

In amongst all this, the Executive Officer of the rural women’s advocacy group, Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) was the only person to phone me up with an aggressive attitude. She was defensive and critical, questioning my methodology, my supervision, and my right to a voice. While she asked for copies of my work she was not prepared to be reciprocal. The organisation had sent out an online questionnaire to their members, which asked questions about depression and linking it to my work. Two members rang me to alert me to the fact of the questionnaire and to say that they felt I was being misinterpreted and that there was a possible attempt to discredit me. This reaction was in complete contrast to that of most farming women. When several months later I spoke at a Provincial AGM of that organisation it was enlightening. Several women freely admitted to having been “hoping mad” about the research, having been influenced by misinformation at the RWNZ Conference, held at the time of the media exposure. I was told that some of these women were referring to me as “that woman”. But by the end of this later meeting where I presented my findings, the same women were responding with “I am just so glad I was able to come today and to hear this. Without a doubt it is the best [most significant] speech that we have ever had” and “That was absolutely wonderful”; “That is our life – you are so right” and “you could have heard a pin drop – that tells you something”; along with “I now understand why my mother was so unhappy.” The response was overwhelming.

Obviously the Executive Officer did not represent the membership although it is doubtful that she would have acted in isolation to her executive. The dynamics of their previous conference at the time of the media exposure, it seems, created an

atmosphere of hysteria, which misrepresented this research and indeed the women themselves. This experience shows the power of rural culture and the power that a small number of women can exert over others. With this one woman (the Executive Officer), I experienced the type of ‘policing’ and silencing by women over other women that this research reveals (Cockburn, 1991; Gatenby & Humphries, 1999; Hazen 2006). It displayed very clearly a matriarchal power that has been identified in this research. This power seems to mimic patriarchy, and seems to be borne from a combination of entrapment and masculinisation where “male values” of control, aggression and domination, are then exerted by women who claim power over other women who trust their knowledge and intentions. This is a finding of note, which needs placing here at the start of this dissertation in order to set the tone for the thesis. This is a critical area, which needs further research in order to further investigate this emergent matriarchal power theory.

The following section outlines these research findings through three Chapters (Six, Seven and Eight), which are set in data themes. The first of these chapters (Chapter Six) describes the first theme of ‘becoming’ both a farm wife and also a member of the rural culture and community.

### **‘Becoming’ and ‘belonging’ as contestation, subjugation and resistance within power and gender relations**

Chapter Six focuses on the process of ‘becoming’ a farm wife. Understanding this process of ‘becoming’ part of an unknown culture through merging the old known culture with the new one, is intrinsic to knowing the person. For farm women, subsequent struggles and tensions are not often admitted to and therefore are not obvious or accepted. It seems important to extricate such experiences and to build a genesis of understanding of how urban women have become rural, and whether, or how, as in-migrant rural women, they are different from those born and bred on farms. Such knowledge, of cross-cultural conflict and tensions within changing subjectivities, is needed to gain insight into cultural change. Narratives of the struggles and successes of in-migrant women and others add to knowledge of a concept not well recognised or understood.

Historically, for women entering this often very different culture, accommodation or even assimilation, of a new set of norms and expectations has been

expected. These norms and expectations have presumed to be accepted by most of these women in 'becoming' 'farmer's wives'. Intrinsic to 'becoming', though, is a sense of 'belonging' and for farm women this sense of belonging, seems problematic. So, as a result of this study, these historical and cultural presumptions are now questioned. The reality, it seems, is more shocking and confusing than in the illusion. For farm daughters, somewhat surprisingly, it seems particularly challenging, as they seem to expect assimilation into the 'happy' life they believe their mothers' experienced. After their often intensive apprenticeships as children and young women, it is easy for them to feel failures. It seems difficult for them to consider that their mother's 'happiness' and contentment may have been illusionary.

The period of 'becoming' entails many subsets, as the young women learn to 'become' wives, mothers, farmers, women, farm-women, and members of a conservative community. From this discussion and from my personal experience as a farm woman of 35 years, it is clear that there is an ambivalence between fulfilling the role of a 'farm wife' or 'farm woman' and fulfilling the needs of the 'self'. Cultural constructs, coupled with personal desire to succeed as a farm woman, exert an often subtle and sometimes blatant pressure on farm women to comply with the expectations of the, often adopted, culture. A constant dilemma may be submerged as personal needs become fragmented, while identities are interwoven to a point where the early identity no longer exists and yet the transitional identity is not authentic.

### **Relationships between maintaining 'self' and maintaining culture within marriage, family, work-roles and community**

Chapter Seven interprets how farm women attempt to maintain their 'self' within these complex power and gender relations. It seems to be problematic for women in seeking to advance from a temporary transitional identity to one which has a sense of authenticity and seems genuine. More commonly, there is a major challenge as the original 'known' identity is challenged and yet the newly acquired identity is not wholly authentic. Maintenance of farming culture, then, seems to stifle maintenance of self. Instead it has become known from these women that they have struggled to maintain their selves with many living unsustainable lives. It is as if they are trapped by what many see as their own sets of choices although in reality they are often socially and culturally imposed; they come as part of the 'package deal' when

marrying a farmer. This results in an exclusion of their aspirations, as it's difficult for them to see the way clear for such possibilities to become reality.

It is common for these farm women to work hard at becoming a typical farm woman. This is manifested by working hard in the farm household, 'helping' out on the farm, being fully involved in their children's lives as well as the wider community and generally looking after 'the men' and supporting their husband's career. While many of these women are legally full partners in the farming business, in reality the farm is thought by the men to be theirs as they demonstrate by mostly using the first person when talking about the farm and farming practices. It is during the period of doubtful personal maintenance that farm women seem to experience a void, an unsustainable level of unhappiness which disallows authenticity, coherence of identity and a sense of personal value. Such repression then is a form of entrapment that avoids possibilities for transformation. The existence of such unhappiness and often depression amongst farm women has not been acknowledged or even realised as a possibility, which has isolated women both personally and from each other. Due to lack of voice and the closet nature of such a phenomenon, women then think it is only they who are 'the problem' and they, in isolation, feel a sense of failure as the individual woman feels she hasn't tried hard enough. The exposure of these findings to farm women has been a revelation as they have said in amazement "I thought it was only me" and "All the other women seemed so happy". There is more optimistic data, though, emanating from this (and other) research that notes significant intergenerational differences in negotiating for 'self' and resisting many cultural constraints; in effect changing culture. This though will be hard-fought as the different generations of farm women manoeuvre for positions of power, a complex set of issues related to matriarchal domination borne from patriarchy. Chapter Eight, then, tells individual stories of transformation often through adversity and immense courage.

### **Transforming self and culture – changing subjectivities through arduous personal odysseys**

Chapter Eight allows several women's stories of courage to stand alone. Their stories of transformative experiences, often borne out of many years of repression, suppression and depression, are too personal to destroy through dissecting the

narratives that speak for themselves. These transformations often occur through pain and suffering and the women's struggles and conflicts very accurately describe how crisis, although painful, if faced can open new worlds. What is clear, from these women's stories, is that transformations occur through a range of possibilities. None of these involvements, though, are transformative on their own. It requires strength to challenge the accepted norms; to negotiate for self and to see and act on other possibilities. They are provoked by some sense of disintegration to enforce new reclamation of 'self' and to assert or reassert their very being, while reinventing a personal strength and confidence. For many this process is not chosen but coerced through crisis. It does though require a form of agentic action. It requires a bold, intuitive or calculated decision to dis-identify through engulfment and become one's own being. The challenge is to maintain the transformative experience, which if not sustainable, is temporary and lacks enduring conversion.

Thus, this chapter narrates a selection of the women's personal odysseys in changing their 'self' and their culture (some by exiting their position) often through prolonged periods of crises. All of the women interviewed and others spoken with in the field, it seems, have had major issues to face in seeking a more empowering position. The phenomenon of entrapment with its lack of freedom of choice and self-justification makes personal action difficult. These women though have forged new paths albeit, for many, within their 'chosen' boundaries as farm wives. They have through their courageous moves been agentic in instigating cultural change, even though in many cases the pull back to relationships and known responsibilities is overwhelming. The concluding chapter (Nine) is summative in its account of changing subjectivities. It elucidates how without empowerment to contest self, women who are vital to the concept of the family farm are not sustained as fully participant and alive human beings.

### **Women have dreams too, you know? Changing subjectivities, a summative discourse of self**

The final chapter (Nine) is a summation of the processes of negotiating identity through empowering decisions. It draws all themes together to a theory of self. It is clear that the ability to negotiate and re-negotiate identity is critical to transforming one's subjectivity (Swann, 1987). This negotiation requires a confidence and freedom,

which is often hard fought, through struggle and making bold decisions. Those women who forge their own identity successfully within the marriage and farm, have negotiated personal choice for life and work requiring some dis-identification through their husband and farm workplace in order to enable discovery of new possibilities and new identities. As turmoil in loss of authentic identity becomes evident, these women are driven to discover congruence in their selves; a self that reflects the person they are or know they can be. This requires a hidden strength, risk-taking and decision-making, challenging but empowering and energising decisions of personal agency.

Many of those women, however, who continue to do what is expected of them are limited by social constraints and drift through life, often unhappy and exhibiting depressive (or what one woman called 'repressive') symptoms. It is clear that the abilities to make decisions, take calculated risks and face challenges add to their transforming sense of self, their way of knowing and their sense of success. This supports Birden's (2002) proposal that such decision-making is energising, in lifting feelings of depression and transforming a sense of well-being. From these women's stories, the ability and power to make innovative decisions is seen as vital to sustaining and transforming a person's subjectivity. Often, it seems the place of 'work' in nurturing positive identity is related to feelings of success and empowerment. This concept seems more readily recognised for men (Foskey, 2002), yet is no less valid for the women in this study. They often find themselves working outside their level of interest, with their skills underutilised, personally under-challenged and unfulfilled.

Crucial to these concepts are the relationships among identity, self, structure and agency. In the process of 'becoming,' an intertwining of roles and engulfing of self with others, form transitional identities. Subsequently, continuity and maintenance of the 'self' is problematic due to the burying of the 'known self' in this inauthentic and incohesive subjectivity. The 'known self' is not reflected nor verified by others, adding to conflict and tension. Thus, a gulf appears between the subjective 'I', known to self and the reflected 'me', as the identity known to others. There is difficulty maintaining everyday roles while seeking authenticity among these 'conflicting selves'. There is a sense that for some, a feeling of alienation is simmering under the surface (Fenwick, 1999). For these women, this often manifests itself as sullenness, misery and depression. An interaction occurs between the social

world and human agency as intentionality is tensely competitive between cultural expectations and personal needs. From a changing sense of self and a need to transform one's subjectivity, new norms or expectations are constructed albeit through much resolution and considerable struggle.

This study of farming women supports Fenwick's (1999) assertion that a strong and at times desperate search for coherence, authenticity and congruence, is the drive behind agentic questioning of one's place and situated constraints. Without empowerment to contest self, women who are vital to the concept of the family farm are not sustained as fully participant human beings. As such, this current inquiry reveals a culture that is compromising its future through not valuing and sustaining the needs of farm women.

In conclusion, this thesis advances contributions to understanding how these 'farm wives' negotiated, reconstructed and reshaped their sense of self, and, at times, also strongly resisted and dis-identified with the social world in which they found themselves unwittingly, and at times, unwillingly, embedded.

**Key contributions made here are:**

1 The central role of 'becoming' and 'belonging' as a function of managing geographical, psychological, social, financial, emotional, intellectual and genderised isolations, along with negotiating a culture of masculinisation. These largely cultural impositions and their negotiation impact greatly on the personal wellness of a woman marrying a farmer, his farm and/or farming career and often his extended farming family.

2 Maintenance of self exists as a function of a sense of belonging, without which maintenance is elusive and issues of entrapment often manifest as matriarchal power and control between competing generations of women. Boundaries between patriarchal power and matriarchal power are precarious as both power bases are destructive for subordinates. Both involve engulfment of self as the subordinate succumbs to the dominating status.

3 Maintenance of one's 'self' requires strength of personal agency. Those who are more strongly influenced by social and cultural expectations seem to bury their own needs and aspirations, in order to belong. In doing so, cultural norms and expectations are maintained. Those who are strongly agentic in their resistance and in negotiating for their 'self' are more concerned with *changing* cultural norms and expectations. The maintenance of that drive and commitment is challenged though, particularly due to a lack of solidarity between farm women.

4 There is thorough evidence from this research that women who continue to defy the norms, reasserting resistance while negotiating 'self', in doing so transform both their 'self' and their culture. These resisters though face resistance from other women often of a higher sociocultural status. Increasingly this transformation is made through negotiating an exit from the farm-marriage.

**This leads to a need for further inquiry in the areas of:**

1. The cultural relationships between patriarchy and matriarchy and ensuing entrapments.
2. The cultural lag of farming culture to embrace shared family life and dual careers as promoted in the 1970s second wave of feminism.
3. Issues of the sustainability of an individual struggling to 'belong' to a culture not of their choosing. It seems transitional identities are forced to become 'permanent' resulting in a disintegrative, alienated sense of 'self' with a lack of fulfilment and a sense of void.

This research has resonated with New Zealand farming women of all ages and particularly young farming men who are struggling with the resistance of young women to marry onto farms. The response, while challenging, indicates strong relevance and critical need.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF 'FARM WIVES', FARM WORK AND WOMEN'S IDENTITY

*... when a woman marries, she marries not only a man but also his job, and from that point onwards will live out her life in the context of the job which she has married.  
(Finch, 1983, p. 1)*

Through merging a review of literature with practical examples and vignettes, a case is made in the next two chapters for understanding the identity, place, agency and trajectories of farm wives' sense of being, within their everyday lives in rural culture. Chapter Two - Changing conceptions of farm wives, farm work and women's identity - considers these issues through outlining and elaborating their general conceptual and methodological positions. They are discussed through an exploration of selected literature and life-views depicting, in particular, effects and influences on women, of farm life and farm work. Chapter Three - Negotiating subjectivity, identity and culture - deliberates more tightly on farm women negotiating their subjectivity, identity and culture. In that chapter, an ambivalence is identified between fulfilling the role of a 'farm wife' or 'farm woman' and fulfilling the needs of the 'self'. In both, cultural constructs, coupled with personal desires to succeed as a farm woman are recognised as often exerting a subtle but sometimes blatant, pressure on farm women to comply with the expectations of the, often adopted, culture. Such an ongoing dilemma may drive personal needs from the equation, fragmenting subjectivities. Over time, these images of self may be interwoven to a point where the early identity is barely recognisable and yet the incumbent, transitional identity is not authentic.

Throughout Chapter Two, a case is developed, which elaborates a view that the tradition of feminism in New Zealand has not served well the interests of farm women. Instead, individual issues of self and agency have become central as bases for women becoming farm women, and for sustaining and transforming their roles on farms and in rural communities. However, there have been significant costs for many farm women through negotiating these outcomes. In order to understand the development and transformation of farm women's 'sense of self', through these negotiations, it is necessary to consider concepts of self and agency, history and

person and cognition and culture. Inter-relationships between and among these concepts are sought along with insight into how they play out in terms of subjectivity, identity and culture. In many ways, the negotiation of self and the changing concepts of farm women's identities comprise negotiation between public and private worlds. These propositions are advanced here drawing upon a carefully selected broad body of literature that illuminates and informs the research questions. Earlier studies, and glimpses of data that are reported in greater detail in later chapters of this thesis, further support these propositions. The aim here is to assemble a coherent conceptual position for investigating the subjectivities of selected farm women, through their personal histories and over time.

### **Conceptions of farm women in New Zealand**

The conception of farm women in New Zealand has been shaped notably by historical and cultural expectations underpinned by a well-embedded view of the 'rural idyll'. This position is part of New Zealand folklore and, yet, on investigation it is clear that it consists of outdated and unrealistic views about the worth and role of farm women as wives. These women's contributions to farmwork and farm-life are under-recognised and equally critically, don't fulfil their needs of 'self'. This is particularly perplexing because New Zealand has such a long and proud tradition of both early feminism and innovative family farming. However, it seems that the roles of farm women, as wives, have not been readily supported by a society, which in other ways exercises equity towards women. Instead of a societal sentiment acknowledging women's contributions to farming and rural life (as central and essential participants), their role seems to be commonly portrayed as secondary. Moreover, support for farm women often seems to come from other women acting agentically, rather than a supportive societal or community sentiment. This is surprising considering that New Zealand has such a proud history of being world leaders in the first wave of feminism in the 1890s. It was one of the first peoples to grant suffrage to women; yet the second wave of feminism was elusive (Belich, 2001). The 1910s –50s are described by Belich (2001) as "something of a dark age for New Zealand feminism" (p. 496). Second wave feminism emerged in the 1960s, gaining momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. Belich (2001) backgrounds both the first and second waves of feminism as accompanied by "the two major systemic shake-ups of modern New Zealand history:

the advents of recolonisation and decolonisation” (p. 497). These periods of political upheaval required a new identity to be forged for this relatively young country and may have created fertile ground for the emergence of solidarity groupings among urban women. In the 1970s, when new urban women’s groups were flourishing (ibid), rural women’s groups conversely were receding due to, it seems, lack of relevance to the incoming women’s lives (Teather, 1996). This indicates differences in needs and outlooks between incoming urban-raised farm wives and those more traditional. It seems the second wave of feminism may have infiltrated these women’s lives generally, yet rural culture and its strong traditions were not easily penetrated. These are critical issues to investigate in order to better understand the reasoning behind differences between urban and rural women.

Through this entire period, farm women have been largely invisible in research of farming issues except as the homemaker and ‘helper’. Women have more often been portrayed as the ‘farmer’s wife,’ who kept the home fires burning thus supporting the farmer in his career. Those without ‘old money’ did whatever farm work was required of them to make the farm productive. Belich (2001) tells the story of one farm woman in the late 1800s who was told by a friend that life was ‘downright slavery for you and the children’ (p. 147). This was in contrast to those with old money who lived the lives of genteel landowners with genteel wives. The difference of class, among those more ‘well heeled’, persists today as aptly felt by one woman in this study when admonished by a farmer for driving an old vehicle, rather than a modern prestige car. It seems to sustain itself also as a basis of matriarchal power; a power, which is reproduced through the generations and identified in the current research as a sustaining force in the entrapment of many farming women. This power seems to silence and restrain many women from expressing their selves and making choices better-suited to their skills and interests (Cockburn, 1991; Gatenby & Humphries, 1999; Hazen 2006). Instead, it keeps them subservient to an accepted cultural image.

Thus, while feminism from the 1970s contributed to the betterment of women, especially in the fields of health, reproduction and women’s rights (Kedgley, 1996), there is relatively little evidence in New Zealand on the changing experiences of farm women. With the growing incidence and authority of feminist viewpoints some international feminist rural-researchers, following on from seminal work investigating women’s experiences (such as Oakley’s work on housework (1974)), began to look at

the place and experience of farm women. From the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there has been a new surge of research (Alston, 1998a; Carbert, 1995; O'Hara, 1998; Sachs, 1996; Shortall, 1999; Whatmore, 1991a) into the place, role, recognition and visibility of farm women in Australia, Canada, Ireland, America and Britain. These, along with other studies (e.g. Brandth, 1994, 1995; Cummins, 2005; Dahlstrom, 1996; Gasson & Winter, 1992; Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002; Little, 1987; Little & Austin, 1996; Mackenzie, 1994; Pini, 2002; Saugeres, 2002; Teather, 1996; and others), emerge as seminal explorations of farm women and their multi-faceted lives. They challenge issues of gender, power, politics and the reality of farm women's lives.

Through the experiences of many of the women reported in the above studies, what emerges are concerns such as women's lack of visibility and power, lack of recognition in property ownership and absence of involvement in farm industry political and producers' groups. While all these issues are quite valid and relevant to farm women today, a more urgent question emerged for me as a farm woman of more than thirty years. For me, it is not merely a question of compartmentalising how labour is divided or who has leadership power or high profiles in farming politics; it is more a question of how women on farms are experiencing their lives. While I know what has happened and is happening in my life as a farm woman, I realised I knew very little about other women on farms. What changes have they made to their 'self' in 'becoming' a 'farmer's wife', how have they maintained their 'self' and how have they transformed their 'self' over time? Such insights are important in order to understand the reality of a range of farm women as participants, their sense of fulfilment or otherwise and their contribution to self and society. Although farming continues to be the major source of wealth for New Zealand's economy, not enough is known about the experiences of farm women. In particular, in the apparent absence of a community and societal sentiment that supports and sustains women as individuals on farms, more needs to be understood about how far women's experiences and negotiations of 'self' go towards learning their roles; roles which are so essential to the family farm and farming communities. This is, perhaps, never more urgent than now as new generations of New Zealand women are demonstrating reluctance to participate in farm-life in the way earlier generations have done.

## **Self and agency: Relationships to culture and change**

Given the above, it seems important to understand the concepts of individual agency and social agency in relation to whether a person changes their culture or the culture changes them (Billett, Smith & Barker, 2005). It is perhaps only through such an understanding that it becomes possible to gain insights into the meaningfulness of life trajectories, and how women in rural New Zealand exercise their 'sense of self' in becoming and sustaining themselves as farm women. New understandings of intentionalities that drive a person's ability to maintain and transform their 'self' within cultural experiences are sought (Bruner, 1990). For these issues to be understood, it is necessary to identify affordances and constraints, social influences and personal abilities that encourage or limit life choices (Fenwick & Somerville, 2006). The relationships between these concepts and points of intersection will be elaborated through analysing personal ontogenies and personal life trajectories.

It seems from other accounts (Carbert, 1995; Cummins, 2005; Shortall, 1994) that farm women have difficulty identifying as individuals. Dion (1990) cited by Shortall (1994) describes the 'trouble' farm women have distinguishing between agricultural issues and their own issues as women, while Carbert (1995, p. 42), similarly, found many "older farm women interviewed seemed to lack a sense of their own self". These women spoke of 'we' when referring to decisions made by their husbands. She found that farmwomen's subjectivities were so "submerged in the collective life of the [farm] household" (1995, p. 43), that they were unable to separate their individual selves from the farm and its complicated relationships. This could be described as 'engulfed selves' (Adler & Adler, 1991) where the self is "guided by a single rather than multiple sets of interests and foci; their behaviour, lives and identities (are) consumed by their one dominating status" (1991, p. 227), (i.e. as farm wives and farmers). This view sees any transformation of other roles or identities as being subordinate to the engulfing role. For example, a person may neglect or abandon personal interests or career options, not because of inability or lack of desire to achieve their goals, but because the one role (e.g. farm wife) has gained ascendancy to a point of exclusiveness.

As such, the 'self' engulfed within the husband's identity, loses individuality and distinctiveness. This disables the maintenance or transformation of their subjective self (i.e. their inner self); the person known to them through life

experiences, at least prior to marriage. In effect, their identity becomes ‘a role to live’ rather than an individual person that is known as authentic. While one identity exerts a position of power or dominance, other identities are abandoned or at least neglected. The ‘self’ becomes uni-focused into a specialised role, constricting transformative identities (Ransom, 1997). When another role is selected, it is only facilitated within the engulfed role. In a less constrained situation, though, a role may have a ‘master status’ while still enabling other identities to exist (Adler & Adler, 1988; 1989; 1991; Hughes, 1945). Moreover, the dilemmas and contradictions of status are restricted by societal and cultural sets of expectations of traits and behaviours, accorded a particular stereotype. A person who forges change by attaining a different status (e.g. farm women’s return to off-farm work in the 1980s) may be excluded by the local women, often remaining a marginal person due to their perceived challenge to others’ positioning and their display of different needs (Hughes, 1945). In effect, even when women have professional status and identities outside the farm, their ‘farm selves’ might still be viewed as being vicarious and perilous because of their master positioning through their husband/partner’s identity. Such tensions of subjectivities amongst farm women are critical to their personal wellbeing and ‘sense of self’ but have been unrecognised and little understood over recent generations.

However, since the 1990s, with the growing body of research into rural women’s lives and work, (e.g. Brandth, 1995; Cummins, 2005; Dahlstrom, 1996; Gasson & Winter, 1992; Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002; Little, 1987; Little & Austin, 1996; Mackenzie, 1994; Pini, 2002, 2005b; Saugeres, 2002; Teather, 1996), there has been a move to better identify this entanglement of subjectivities. Understanding changing subjectivities across individual farm women’s lives, though, still remains largely lacking. This is particularly significant as rarely do individuals negotiate their subjectivities within situations in which work and living are brought so close together. Indeed, Shortall (1994) sees the family farm as “one of the last residues of the organisation of labour through the household” (p. 284). She cites Elbert (1981), who saw attempts to separate farm women’s merged family and farm systems, as risking losing “the holistic reality of farm families, family farms and their location in a world system” (p.284). This seems to be why and how the traditional roles of farm wives have persisted while the lives of urban women have changed vastly. Likewise, Whatmore (1991a), in reference to the family farm model, describes commoditisation as a process “by which the family household and farm(ing)

enterprise are tied into the wider market economy in such a way that their form and conditions of existence are increasingly structured by it" (p. 7). As such, family farms are dominated by both global and local economic decisions yet maintained greatly by the multi-faceted roles that women play, often with little or no extrinsic or intrinsic reward. These relations are often seen by feminists as exploitative, as women play an essential unifying role in the farming organisation while also often maintaining their communities (Shortall, 1993).

In sum, farm women's identity is seen as being captured by their dominating role as a 'farm wife'. Their 'self' as an individual may be dominated to a point of non-recognition within their roles, their life-partnership (e.g. marriage), their farming responsibilities and cultural expectations. Understanding how a selection of women have coped with this overwhelming absorption of 'self' is vital to understanding the well-being or otherwise of farm women. This is vital to investigating the sustainability of the 'family farm', considering the critical roles played by women and their importance to the success and continuance of such farming enterprises (Allan, 2002). This vicarious identification, of women with men's careers and lives, does not sit well with feminist viewpoints. It is unclear, though, why these sets of ideas and beliefs have not been 'known' or generally understood by women within the culture or whether, as may be more likely, social and cultural pressures contained such viewpoints.

### **Feminism and farm women: Not an easy relationship**

Another viewpoint is that feminism has not been embraced openly by recent generations of farm women, possibly due to a perception of its hostility towards men, which does not fit with their experience of interdependence (Brandth, 2002; Carbert, 1995). While the younger generation of women seem more ready to exercise their feminism by choosing not to participate in farm-life, many existing farm women resist any likelihood of 'truth', in claims of oppression and exploitation. This seems to be fronted by hostility and suspicion but underpinned, likely, by fear of that not 'known' or understood. And yet this, arguably, is a generation that most needs such a feminist position to assist them in understanding their lives.

But, this suspicion or resistance to an ideology often viewed by rural women as extreme is not surprising when debates regarding diversity and difference persist

among academic women who are more versed with feminist contentions. Feminist approaches and viewpoints fuel ongoing debate amongst and between women within feminist literature (e.g. Anthias, 2002; Bacchi, 2000; Bulbeck, 2001, 2005a, 2005b; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1997; Oakley, 1998; Reinhartz, 1992; Roseneil, 1995; Walby, 2001). Within these discourses, feminisms are more commonly seen as pluralisms within situated knowledges (Bondi, 1997; Haraway, 1988; Prins, 1995) rather than one way of knowing, with a need to embrace other oppressions and exploitative structures like class, race and culture. Therefore it is understandable that farm women as a group, isolated both geographically and also from other women, have not seen feminism as relevant to their interdependent lives as farming families.

So, without an understanding of identities, stereotypes and different societies, feminisms can polarise cultures seen as different. As with any sense of belonging (or lack of the same) “identity is always framed with difference and alterity” (Anthias, 2002, p. 277). Considering these diversities, cultural practices have different meanings depending on positionalities and whether experienced as an insider, outsider or onlooker. This, in itself, may create tensions through difference between varying generations of farm women and amongst those women with differing perceptions, experiences and status (Mavin, 2006). Acknowledging difference and managing those diversities, rather than seeking an often illusionary equality (e.g. Eveline & Todd, 2002; Fink, Pastore & Riemer, 2001; Liff, 1997; Wilson, 2005), better fits a culture where women ideally should be valued for their very differences. Often, though, an intense loyalty to sameness is borne of a degree of de-selfing. This occurs through domination and subordination of identity, perpetrated by husbands, extended family or cultural (and often female) cliques, by means of subtle or overt control (e.g. Adler & Adler, 1988, 1995). For farm women, this is often manifested as a sense of commitment with subsequent goal alignment focused on the needs of farm, farm-family and work-role identity (see: Becker & Carper, 1956; Becker, 1960).

Commonly, farm women live within an amalgam of home, work, farm, family, community and politics, which requires co-operation and interdependence for survival, both practically and financially. Therefore, views that seek to dislocate or antagonise these relations are often treated with hostility. This is despite the fact that, when farm businesses are analysed, women are often seen as unpaid, undervalued and unrecognised but still integral partners in a complex organisation (e.g. Cummins, 2005; Kelly & Shortall, 2002; Shortall, 2002; Teather, 1998; Whatmore, 1991a). In

sum, this ambivalence suggests more and tightly focussed feminist critique is required as, while publicly women are valued as ‘farming partners’ and women are thought to be ‘content’ with predominantly supportive roles, this seems not to be the reality. In reality, it seems the interdependence and cooperation is not always well-balanced or equally satisfying or rewarding. This possibility is problematic in itself, though, as it goes against a rural cultural sentiment that privileges interdependence and co-operation while not carrying such judgements through to prioritising the women’s needs for ‘self’ (Murray, 2007).

### **Farm household work as farmwork**

A great proportion of this interdependence is borne, often silently and invisibly by women, as inside and outside work intermingle. Often, they are not even given status of legitimate work. A great proportion of farm household work is farm work, not housework or domestic work although it has been convenient for some, historically, to describe the mix as ‘household’ work (Sander, 1985). This, however, renders much of the farm women’s farm work and other work, as invisible. As Shortall (1993) points out “housework is of a different nature within a farm household because it accommodates the demands of the farm” (p. 174). Her research identified that “farm women frequently do many jobs simultaneously and in many cases it is the continual presence of the women which is important” merging domestic, reproductive work, management responsibilities and farm work; thereby allowing the production unit to persist as an economic unit.

The importance of this ‘continual presence’ is difficult to quantify or even to describe succinctly but it meshes with women’s work even when this work is professional and conducted off-farm. Recently, a private health professional who is also a farm woman, described to me how the previous evening after work and after feeding family, helping with school homework and so on, she worked until midnight preparing food for a ‘docking gang’ the next day. In the morning, she prepared more food for ‘the men’, made school lunches as well as doing housework and laundry – all before leaving for her health-based practice. She said, “I arrived here (after forty minutes travel) and thought ‘I’ve already done a day’s work and now I need to work here until 6pm-7pm and then go home and do the same.’ ” Somewhere she also fitted

in paperwork for her practice. But she felt *appreciated*, as her husband was “taking her out for a meal” at the weekend.

This story tells us much about rural life - food, children, off-farm work and travelling at the weekend for a ‘treat’ meal. And this is by no means an isolated tale. This professional woman, likely, included some farming tasks within her day also, which would barely register a mention, as it is just part of the daily routine. As described, it is increasingly common for farm women to complete two or more days’ work in one. Within farming culture, not to cope with such a pressured day would be to admit failure. Hence, the need to understand the totality of farm wives’ experiences and how their farm roles are intermingled with those of parenting and engagement in forms of paid or unpaid employment, outside the farm.

### **Women’s role in changing cultural expectations in farming worlds**

Entanglement of life-roles and responsibilities through engulfment of identity in the husband’s position, family, place of work and career, seems to have a disintegrative effect on the women’s sense of self over time. Providing for the continuity of cultural belief systems may then be challenged. There seem undoubtedly intergenerational differences of expectations of farm women. Younger women, as well as those older women who have reached a point of non-compliance, question their place not through solidarity but more agentically. Through these decisions transformations both to self and, subsequently, to rural culture, may occur.

In acknowledging this and given the dynamic nature of social circumstances, such as farming, and the need to understand the consequences of the repositioning of actors within that circumstance, it is necessary to consider the role that farm women play in the changing world of New Zealand farming life. Farm women can be seen as social actors shaping their own worlds, their own culture, as “active agents in shaping the world around them” (O’Hara 1998, p.153). To further understand this process, the importance and value of gaining understanding of means of change, through contextual and culturally specific studies of the experiences of farm women, is emphasised. In this way, the reality of the lives of farm women may be made increasingly visible, valued and understood, while strategies to change their roles may be accepted as valid. Although off-farm work might be seen as affording women a separate sense of vocational identity, it is debatable whether this is a true detachment

from the farm. The entanglement of farm, work and family seems almost inextricable, especially in consumption and reproductive roles. Where control of resources, such as farm ownership, access to money or other family resources (such as the family car), “is strongly asymmetrical, women feel an acute sense of dependence and loss of personal autonomy, which in some cases appears to be retrievable only in widowhood” (O’Hara, 1998, p. 160). Thus, for instance, if women are able to retain their own money as off-farm income, it may provide a route to independence and some personal autonomy (hooks, 2000). Often though, these women’s incomes are required to supplement the farm income especially in the early days of farm and family or in times of climatic or production-based adversity.

Hence, given this entanglement in farms and farm life, it is helpful also to examine the experiences of women who have become disentangled. The perspective of women separated from their farm and their farmer husband, either through death or dissolution of marriage provides a vehicle for added understanding. These accounts may add to knowledge of how their newly independent lives differ from their more interdependent lives as farm wives. This may include the transformation of ‘self’ through, and as a result of, such crises. Maybe, in New Zealand, women who often can leave a marriage with half of the value of the farming enterprise see this as a retrieval of their ‘self’ while taking what is by law and by right, their property. It can, though, be seen by observers as ‘gold-digging’ (Price & Evans, 2006). As one farming agent said to me recently while describing marriage break-ups in the rural downturn and particular difficulties within the Kiwifruit industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s, “they (i.e. farm women) went out the gate and the money went with them”. Another farmer, whose wife left him, said that he was a victim of his own success. These attitudes illustrate a tension between the women’s legal positioning and the social and cultural attitude to this property law. In the case of farms, this law is viewed more as a business proposition with tax benefits. There seems a reluctance to legitimate the ‘ownership edict’ with wives, as business partners, assuming equal ‘voting’ rights. This research confirms that farm women seldom take a full and absolute part in major farm decisions.

The indication in both these cases is that the women left with the ‘men’s’ money and that they would not have left if no money was available to them. This is an expression of power, which is central to the argument that “farming culture affords men more power than women, [and that] central to this is access to property”

(Shortall, 1999, p. 2). From this viewpoint, change is predicted for farm women, emanating from “more general changes in gender ideology, or in the value and ethos of society ... (or) organised protest” (Shortall, 1999, p. 3). Correspondingly, a future with farm ‘wives’ less involved in the family enterprise altering the nature of family farming is predicted by some with farm women trying to break the cycles of dependency by discouraging their daughters’ participation in farming (O’Hara, 1998). This influence is seen as a response to a life strongly constrained by patriarchal family relations in farm-work and farm-life. By enabling an array of other opportunities for their daughters through education and travel, it is conceived that young women will exercise individual choice. From such a vantage point, mothers are seen potentially as exerting the greatest influence on the future of family farming, through socialisation and education. Thereby, social reproduction of the next generation of farm women is either limited or liberated by their mother’s agentic action and conscious (or subconscious) engagement in challenging and changing the cultural profile that they evidenced as restraining in their own lives (O’Hara, 1998). Early data from this present study indicates some support for these influences while requiring further investigation to clarify intentions.

In summary, while New Zealand property law recognises women in marriage as partners in property, it is unclear whether there has been a reciprocal change in societal sentiment to accompany this change. Therefore, it is pertinent that new perspectives are sought on property and power, to add to knowledge of relationships between empowerment, change and culture. It remains less evident whether cultural, societal or personal sentiments change as a result of law or simply accommodate those points that are convenient. Yet, the exercise of agency by farm women as mothers and leaders also indicates something of the capacity for individuals to collectively remake culture and cultural practices, as societal values transform (Salling Olesen, 2006). But while both the exercise of changing values, and the re-making of culture, are seen to be advanced by the agency of individual women, sitting somewhere behind this agency are issues of self, identity and intentionality. These issues are often bound by a sense of responsibility and staunch cultural expectations, limiting individual agency.

### **Individual or social agency – influences towards generational change**

Farm women's place in the farming business has traditionally depended largely on the need for continuity of family and farm through reproduction. Historically, farmers and their wives have bred their own replacements according to gender i.e. the males for farming-labour and ownership and the females for farmer's wives for young men within their community (Belich, 2001; Whatmore, 1991a). As discussed, though, there is emerging evidence that young farm women through their experience of tertiary education and travel are neither choosing to marry farmers nor to return to the family farm. Education and travel have opened up other options for these young women who in previous generations commonly assumed the roles of replacement wives for young farmers. Mothers while not openly admitting or voicing any dissent, subversively, it seems, encourage their daughters to consider these other choices while discouraging them from following the tension and conflicts of life known to them as a 'farmer's wife' or 'farm woman'. Farm daughters, likewise, have often been party to, and observers of, the pressures and often deleterious effects of farm-life on their mothers. As one New Zealand farmer told me in earlier research (Allan, 2002), he knew that his wife never wanted to go farming because "she had seen what it had done to her mother and she didn't want to live a life like that" but she reluctantly went along with his decision; a reluctance she lived with for 27 years. While previous generations of women simply ignored such conflict, young women of today, it seems, are less likely to do so. This can be a source of dilemma and conflict as young farming men, often with considerable difficulty, seek willing partners in life, including supportive helpers for their farms. This presents a significant problem for the continuity of these communities and the traditional family farms that largely comprise farming culture.

Currently, in both New Zealand and Australia, competitions and functions are organised as means to "find a farmer a wife" (Australian Woman's Weekly, August, 2007; Little, 2003; Little & Panelli, 2007). These initiatives are to encourage young city women, who might be attracted to the romantic image of farming and potential land-ownership, to seek male farm partners. As one young woman humorously asked of a young farmer at a 'speed-dating' evening (reported TV One news, 2004) "What I want to know is - how many siblings have you got and how sick is your father?" The indication was, "if you inherit the farm you're a catch, if not, forget it!" This young woman seemed to be basing her judgements on a rural idyll, which in reality is

increasingly elusive. Such promotions though, when successful, may attract in-migrating young women to the role of a 'farmer's wife' bringing new blood into the rural area with accompanying new ideas. Carbert (1995) found that those farm women who never grew up on farms "tended to articulate grievances in terms more positive to feminism" (p. 145). These urban-raised women from non-farming backgrounds bring with them an intercultural milieu of practices, values and expectations, influencing possible change. As in-migrants, belonging, at least for a time, to at least two worlds, these women have the facilities to challenge and transform cultures over time (Alfred, 2006; Fenwick & Somerville, 2006). This set of concepts is explored within the present study, with early indications suggesting ongoing difficulties in accommodation.

It is questionable, then, whether transformations within the family farm are social and productive in practice, thus being socially agented, or "rooted in human agency" and, by implication, negotiated through human consciousness and subjective intention (Whatmore, 1991a, p. 7). The family farm, though, is more than an agricultural unit; it is also a social unit with an internal dynamic reproducing its own labour power and relations of production (Friedman, 1986). Within these social units, dynamics of gender inequalities and gender relations are produced through both 'coercion and consent' (Ransom, 1997) as "identities and practices are accommodated and sustained ... contested and transformed" (Whatmore 1993, p. 3). These cultural influences and pressures occur within the participants' experiences of engagement and participation, both in the farm-marriage and the wider farming practice located within their local and extended practice communities. Thus, individual action is influenced by, constructed in and situated within these social relations (Whatmore (1991a). Likewise, social structure is interdependent with human agency and sense-making by individual actors. It may be that either individual action and/or social action are transformative of social structure, thereby changing culture and constructing new meaning. As such, new norms or expectations are often constructed through resolving conflicts and tensions and through experiencing considerable struggle.

In summary, influence or pressure may be for or against a particular choice with individual 'choice' often being a complex and difficult concept to identify (see: Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001; Iyengar & Lepper, 2002; Kim & Drolet, 2003). As Butler (1997) (cited Fenwick & Somerville, 2006) concedes, when choice is impossible due to subjection, pursuing subordination is a form of survival mechanism.

It is becoming increasingly clear though, from both literature and also from early personal accounts in this current research that women's attitudes to farming are changing intergenerationally. While more mothers are influencing their daughters' life trajectories (albeit often subconsciously) by providing educational opportunities and encouraging career choices, the younger women themselves are actively seeking new options (see: Ansley, 2006; Glass & Choy, 2001; Kerr, 2001; NZPA, 2005; N. Smith, 2007; Watkin, 2005). Such women may be transforming cultural expectations privately by enabling agency (Salling Olesen, 2006). It seems though, that farm women generally are reluctant to discuss their lack of satisfaction and fulfilment openly with their daughters or others, through a sense of loyalty to their role and to cultural expectations. These frustrations are, nevertheless, increasingly picked up on subconsciously by farm daughters and farming sons.

Therefore, it adds to the importance of understanding further, relationships between individual and social agency, intention and cultural press and possibly points of intersection, (Billett, 2006b) through exploring the lives of farm women. Comparative data (Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994) between those raised on farms and those urban women who become new entrants to the culture through marriage, are sought to isolate the influences of their earlier upbringing and social experiences towards their 'becoming', 'belonging' and transforming 'selves' within their farm lives. It may be that the in-migrant 'farm wives', due to their inter-cultural, subjective vision, are influencing the roles of young women. Alternatively, it may be that factors requiring urban residential and social life, like tertiary education and training, influence both urban and rural women, thus changing visions of 'possible selves'.

In conclusion, individual action is influenced by, constructed in and situated within social relations (Whatmore, 1991a), which include early experiences, such as farm-marriage, farm-family and farming practice. Yet agency is also likely influenced by the wider social and cultural expectations and accomplished through engagement and participation (Billett & Smith, 2006; Etelapelto & Saarinen, 2006). Moreover, social systems are likely to be interdependent on human agency and sense-making by individual actors. It is proposed that in-migrant women and, particularly, the younger generation of farm women with their differing life-views, may transform not only their roles but subsequently rural culture itself, through their challenge to, and resistance of, existing cultural sentiments that are enacted in rural farming

communities. As such, new norms or expectations may be constructed through resolving conflicts and tensions and through experiencing considerable struggle.

### **History-in-person: Influencing formation, reformation and transformation of ‘self’**

Conflicts and tensions within an individual’s ‘self’ may be manifestations of a struggle between a person’s history, within their social and cultural systems (e.g. farming), and their more personal and intimate experiences and awareness of their history-in-person. These two concepts are not equivalent or necessarily related to each other in predictable ways (Holland & Lave, 2001a; Willis, 1977) but often come together as conflict and in struggle. How a person forms and transforms their self as subjects and participants in their social, cultural and historical worlds, though, is not clearly understood.

From a sociocultural/historical viewpoint, identity and agency are seen as constructed through social discourses and experiences within our cultural worlds (e.g. Cole & Scribner, 1974; Rogoff, 2003; Scribner, 1976/1997). For instance, young women, who marry farmers or choose farming life-partners, enter a new cultural place of rurality. This place requires new knowledge of agriculture and some acceptance of the geographic and social isolation incorporated within this change. As one woman put it, “you need to know and remember the ‘country rules’.” This learning may begin with what Willis (2001) calls a ‘cultural apprenticeship’. It requires an evolving identity and way of ‘becoming’ in order to ‘belong’ to a chosen (or enforced) culture, emphasising learning through participation in culturally-derived practices (e.g. Billett, 2001a, 2001b, 2004b, 2006c; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 2001; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Wenger, 1998). Over time this learning may become almost intrinsic to the person’s enduring history and their ‘sense of self’. Alternatively, it may sit uneasily as an expression of incongruency requiring negotiation between the personal and the social. Such history, though, whether persistent or more transient, consists of stories, practices and myths (Dolby, Dimitriadis, & Willis, 2004; Willis, 1977, 2001), from which enduring cultural experience and practice is expressed. Personal stories, though, may conflict with those more collectively narrated as cultural ‘truths’.

Clearly, then, history in time and place does not simply equate to history-in-person (Holland & Lave 2001a). Any relationship between the two is often one of

struggle – either intermittent or constant - as the personal (i.e. private) conflicts with the public. Such conflicts cause tensions for both the individual and for the social practice. A variety of instances, of cultural production of identity through participation and engagement, have noted the significance of personal agency within historical and cultural life experiences (e.g. Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner & Cain, 1998; Skinner, Pach & Holland, 1998). These reinforce the need to understand the relationship between personal and cultural factors in both human development and cultural identification – an idea which is central to this thesis. Personal growth and learning require engaging and participating in challenging, different and new experiences and engaging with people who are attestations of difference (Miller, 1986). The engagement necessarily, but often merely temporarily, creates unequal relationships with the inequality creating both intrapersonal and interpersonal tension. Miller sees this inequality creating skewed interaction that prevents open engagement in facing real differences. The relationships, while they may work for a period, limit growth through burying potential self-knowledge and knowledge of ‘other’ – that not acknowledged. Such acknowledgement does not seek to provide parity but rather to negotiate shared status and power. Tension and conflict are held as a necessity for and inevitable source of all growth; “an absolute necessity if one is to be *alive*” in the true sense of the word (Miller 1986, p.125). Many farm women, though, by their own accounts, seem to succumb to what they describe as “the quiet life”: avoiding any open conflict. While this may be personally destructive, it seems that the isolation of rural life combined with a patriarchally-powered culture encourages this acceptance for practical reasons, for survival (Butler, 1997).

In this cultural study, then, there is a need to uncover the women’s personal experiences and their reality rather than that which is culturally ‘known’. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) advance the need for cultural studies of the person to focus more dominantly on *process*. They see process as an “interlocking genesis, that is actually a co-development of identities, discourses, embodiments and imagined worlds that inform each moment of joint production and are themselves transformed by that moment” (p. vii). Their work seeks to build on that of Vygotsky (1978, 1987) and Bakhtin (1981, 1990) incorporating mediation through social interchange in remaking social and personal conditions. Issues, concerning both choices for and impositions on farm women, may become ‘known’ through personal

disclosure in this cultural study, through legitimising their personal experiences; through learning *how*, the *process*.

So, to further understand the subjective nature of learning and life in relation to ‘self’, these farm women’s storied and lived lives, their realities, will be given voice while developing ideas about identity and formation of subjectivity. Through a ‘history in person’ approach, this cultural study of farm women will focus on their experiences and processes of ‘becoming’, and their developing subjectivities through discourse and embodiments within their worlds. It will explore how through their life challenges as ‘farm wives’, they transform their role and their culture while at the same time transforming (or being transformed) themselves. Struggles and tensions between these two often competing demands (i.e. culture and self) need to be observed both from a public and private viewpoint to construct new meaning of the place and role of conflict in change. It follows that, in order to understand how the relationships between individual development and societal change progress, it is necessary to consider the relationship between culture and cognition.

### **Cognition and culture: Challenge, stimulation and care of self**

Early data from this research indicates issues for an incoming farm wife between learning for her new culture and learning for self. It seems crucial to challenge ‘self’ over time through intellectual challenge and mental stimulation by means of choice and desire rather than cultural impositions. Moreover, new knowledge alone appears insufficient to care for one’s intellectual needs, with relationships between cultural needs and ‘needs of self’ far from mutual (Murray, 2007).

Cognition and culture, then, are central to how identity and subjectivity are transformed through life and work (Billett, 2006a; Billett & Pavlova, 2005; Billett & Somerville, 2004; Cole & Scribner, 1974; Scribner, 1976/1997). As a pioneer of the sociocultural-historical approach to studying the complex relationships between the individual and society, mind and practice, in order to understand life and learning, Scribner sought to explain the relationship between individual thinking and everyday practice (Rogoff, 1997). She saw historical and personal efforts over time, contributing to a mutuality of societal influences and individual action. By studying people engaged in social practices within their specific culture, Scribner (1976/1997) sought to elucidate the relationships between the individual, society and cultural

change. These relationships though are still not well understood even thirty years since her seminal work and despite the growing body of relevant research. Certainly, these relationships are central to understanding the different kinds and levels of engagement of farm women across generations, in the enduring institutional and conservative culture of agriculture/farming.

Young women moving from an urban lifestyle to a rural lifestyle often encounter a degree of 'culture shock', with the adjustments required of them due to the disruption of their normal social perspectives (Jary & Jary, 1995). They are commonly confronted with an unfamiliar or even alien culture, in which they need to participate. While this change of culture may be unsettling, it may also have positive effects with an eventual new depth of understanding and new relationships within their new cultural world (Adler, 1975; Alfred, 2006). If an authentic membership, to a new subcultural group, is constructed with a 'sense of belonging', they may eventually feel 'at home'. The personal fragmentation though, of conflict-avoidance, with trade-off of 'self' for personal and social harmony (Salling Olesen, 2006), often makes 'becoming' traumatic for the 'foreigner'; requiring a prodigious, isolating, individual investment (e.g. Hall, 1995, Lave, 2001).

Further, cultural theorists like Scribner (1976/1997), Cole & Scribner (1974), Goodnow (1990) and Skinner, Pach & Holland, (1998), add another dimension to the work of cognitive scientists, like Resnick (1987, 1989) and Anderson (1982, 1987, 1993), through researching cognition and culture; by studying the impacts of social contexts (e.g. family, community, culture) on development, over their life-course. These include indigenous groups of people learning and living within their natural settings. Comparatively, a change from urban to rural culture, while it may be considered a minor shock, remains a significant change, worthy of detailed and thorough investigation and observation. The adjustments required within the process of construction of evolving identity and sense of self, are significant. Scribner (1976/1997) views cultural variations in cognition, illuminated through cross-cultural research, as re-defining intelligent behaviour and the role of experience in 'becoming'.

In summary and conclusion, interpersonal relationships, it seems, are vital to cognition and culture through both social and intellectual stimulation. Farm women provide instances and, therefore opportunities to further illuminate inter-cultural influences and experiences. Urban, rural and immigrant mixes can be compared and

contrasted in order to understand their experiences of learning, becoming and belonging to their new and often very conservative culture. Early investigations indicate surprising and somewhat shocking findings of relationships that will add to these seminal works.

### **Place of relationships in culture, learning and subjectivity**

The place and value of interpersonal relationships and their relevance to that of work, learning and identity, for farm women, is one of contention (e.g. Foskey, 2002). But, if, according to the view of some theorists, (e.g. Bierema, 2001; Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Hayes & Flannery, 2000) women have a preference to learn socially with others through engagement in a mutually supportive environment, the reciprocity of the farm-marriage becomes essential, considering the entangled and solitary lives that farm women and their husbands often live. This is particularly pertinent considering that many farm women lack easy access to other women with similar interests. This view is tentatively confirmed from early data in this thesis, where it seems difficult for women to develop confidants among other farm women while living in their male dominated and patriarchally-powered everyday worlds. This early indication requires greater insight through further research within the complexities of farming culture. Early signals are that women need some separateness to manage the risk of sense of identity and power being subsumed and thereby reinforcing the historically assumed identity (Bierema, 2001; Brooks, 2000). These views suggest the importance of individuality and agency in women's sense of autonomy, but with strong social connections particularly with other women. This study of farm women, then, has particular insights into this complex mix of needs while participants live in comparative geographical, social, emotional and genderised isolations.

Through these isolations, therefore, farming women may be seen to have separateness to their life, work and learning. However, they risk being subsumed by their farming work-partners/husbands and through living in a male dominated society (i.e. workplace and community). Their everyday working lives, need investigating in order to isolate their realities and the relationships amongst these complex issues. Previous research (Allan, 2005a) identified a crucial need for some young farming men to withdraw from family farms in which they have grown up, in order to retain a personal identity and strong personal disposition while extending their working

knowledge. It may be that the women need to manage a degree of personal separation from the entanglements of farm, family, work and farm-household ties, in order to maintain their selves as individuals. For instance, it seems (Allan, 2005a) that those young farmers who remained 'at home' and working for their father struggled to develop the dispositional skills to enable use of knowledge. Those men remained more isolated with particular difficulty in gathering about them knowledgeable and supportive individuals or groups of people to learn with and to learn from; having difficulty constructing new working knowledge. They remained engulfed in the identity constructed through childhood and adolescence rather than seeing other 'possible' selves. These men, similarly to many women in this current study, have been victims of patriarchal control of wealth and power-control, sustained by inheritance systems (Connell, 2005). For them, such power systems have created disadvantages by limiting possibilities while often concurrently burdening them with the responsibility of sustaining the inheritance for another generation. From women in this study, though, early data indicates a growing resistance to such control, especially by the younger generation of farm women; a growing resistance to trading-off their 'self'. Such resistance can empower both parties in power relationships as individuals, through regulating their own subjectivities transform not only their individual 'selves' but also those of others, while creating new cultural norms (Fenwick, 2007). But, while an intense interplay between gender and power relations (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987, 2002, 2005) has persisted over time it is now being played out under changing conditions in rural New Zealand. These are complex issues that need to be understood more fully to account for the mix of separateness, connection and relationships within the lives of farming women with regard to their subjectivity and growing sense of self.

In summary, this chapter has proposed that a tradition of feminism in New Zealand has not served well the interests of farm women. Instead, issues of self and agency have become central as bases for women 'becoming' farm women, and for sustaining and transforming their roles on farms and in rural communities. However, there has been significant personal cost for many farm women through these negotiations. A farm woman's 'sense of self' is, likely, compromised through being engulfed in a social system with societal and cultural sentiments that allocate low status and peripheral roles to them. Yet, much is demanded of them culturally, including how they are to be valued. Absent here is the space and scope for self and

agency that sit outside of these roles and sentiments. Hence, it is necessary to consider concepts of self and agency, history and person, the relationship between culture and cognition and how these play out in terms of subjectivity, identity and culture. In many ways, the negotiation of self and the changing concepts of farm women's identities comprise negotiation between public and private worlds. These propositions are advanced here drawing upon a broad body of literature, earlier studies and glimpses of data that are reported in greater detail later in this dissertation. The attempt here is to assemble a coherent conceptual position for researching the subjectivities of selected farm women, through their personal histories and over time. In making sense of their lives and experiences, new knowledge is sought to add to current understanding of changing subjectivities and subsequently transforming 'sense of self', through cultural participation.

In conclusion, Chapter Two has considered the changing conceptions of 'farm wives', farm work and women's identity. It has argued the importance of understanding further relationships between individual and social agency, and intention and cultural press. It advances particular insights into the complex mix of social and gender isolations within patriarchally-powered everyday worlds while emphasising conflict between needs of self and needs of culture. These needs are seen as far from mutual. The general conceptual and historically-based position has been outlined through an exploration of literature and life-views depicting, in particular, effects and influences for women, of farm life and farm work. Chapter Three, in furthering the case for research, deliberates on farm women negotiating subjectivity within the strongly patriarchal traditions and often gender-based and power-based culture of farming and agriculture. It builds on issues raised in Chapter Two by discussing theoretical issues relating to subjection and subjectivity. Other similar work and life partnerships with two-person careers are compared and contrasted. Particular issues, relating to a sense of fulfilment or lack thereof, are pursued in relation to farm women's subjectivity, identity, work and 'place'. The silencing of women by their selves, other women and cultural pressures is seen as critical to limiting both personal and cultural change.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FARM WOMEN: NEGOTIATING SUBJECTIVITY, IDENTITY AND CULTURE

*People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are (Holland et al., 1998, p. 3).*

The general conceptual and historically-based position of farm women's challenges to 'self', as 'farm wives', was outlined in Chapter Two. Changing conceptions of 'farm wives', farm work and women's subjectivities were elaborated through an exploration of literature supported by life-views. Accordingly, the chapter identified issues of changing intergenerational expectations and resistance that are critical to the research focus. Issues of the 'engulfed self' disabling the maintenance and transformation of the individual's subjectivities were seen as critical to this current enquiry.

This chapter deliberates in a more focussed fashion on farm women's negotiations of their subjectivities, within the strongly patriarchal traditions, along with the often gender-based and power-based culture of farming and agriculture. It argues that there is ambivalence between fulfilling the role of a 'farm wife' or 'farm woman' and fulfilling the needs of the 'self'. Also, that cultural constructs, coupled with personal desire to succeed as a farm woman often exert a subtle, yet sometimes blatant, pressure on farm women to comply with the expectations of the (often) adopted-culture. Such an ongoing dilemma may drive personal needs from the equation, thereby fragmenting subjectivities. Over time, these images of self may be interwoven so that early identity is barely recognisable and yet the incumbent, transitional identity is not authentic. This may manifest as a sense of unwellness, unhappiness and resentment. From the earliest evidence in this study, it seems that, at times, the women participants are engaged in a prolonged transition where they can neither go back nor go forward. These critical conflicts between farm women's more public identity and more private 'sense of self' contribute to further tensions compounded by senses of invisibility and alienation that, in effect, silence 'self'. Through outlining the purposes for enquiry and the research focus, it argues the case

for critical research into the changing subjectivities of selected farm women in New Zealand.

### **Farm women: Subjectivity, identity and culture**

Subjectivity is seen as a personal portrayal of identity comprising a shifting phenomenon (Fenwick, 2000). It results from, “one’s positionality respective to the norms and knowledge of particular communities, one’s complex and changing understandings of ‘self’, one’s desires and intentions shaped from the cultural imaginary, and one’s moving location within cultural discourses” (p.1). From early data of farm women participants, subjectivity is projected as the self that they recognise and know; that is, congruent with the way they see their disposition, knowledge and future possibilities in relation to their personal attributes, skills and abilities. It is problematic when this ‘self’ is reflected differently by others, making self-verification (Swann, 1983; 1987; Swann & Read, 1981; Swann, Rentfrow & Guinn, 2002) contentious. A somewhat alien transitional identity that is learned from and through others may be necessary for survival and yet constitute a constant personal conflict. From this, struggles emerge, often sourced from within the individual’s place and positionality though not necessarily of her direct choosing.

As negotiator, while a woman may act agentially from personal drive, she is also shaped (often stealthfully) through cultural and social interaction and discourse; as she changes, she is also changed, often despite her ‘self’. Through a range of interactions, subjectivity evolves through ‘choice’ of particular positions and influences, while resisting those not desired (see: Hazen, 2006). These ‘choices’ though are made within constraints and shaped through cultural and social engagement. They are thus neither ‘autonomous’ nor ‘rational’ but more accurately chosen through lack of options (see: Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001; Iyengar & Lepper, 2002; Kim & Drolet, 2003). In the case, for example, of men disapproving of their wives off-farm work influences, it is those men who resist both vocally and through actions; resisting their wife’s social, emotional and intellectual needs and possibilities. This has the potential for major interpersonal conflict if the farm wives’ position their own interests above those of the farm and yet inner personal conflict is likely if the woman capitulates. They are fighting both the cultural norm and the traditionally dominant partner; challenging both power and gender relations (e.g. Alvesson &

Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987; 2002; 2005). However, if the work is required to financially support the farm then the equation may change, giving the woman another negotiating tool. Nevertheless, this often entails the third shift phenomenon and work overload; working as a sense of success often to the point of unwellness and despair (Fenwick & Somerville, 2006; Walkerdine, 2003). It seems though that the women who can keep their earnings for their self have more personal financial power (hooks, 2000), which again shapes their identity and feelings of self-worth. The interim space though may be a difficult learning curve which requires negotiating amongst such 'entangled learning' and entangled lives (Fenwick, 2000).

Personal entanglement in the lives and careers of their husband or partner is contentious for many farm women. This is particularly so if the men are unable or are unwilling to change attitudes and priorities in the same time-frame as their wives/partners. A substantial distance in time may concurrently become a distance interpersonally, contributing to disputatious or isolated relationships. Those are especially awkward as these men and women often spend both 'work' and 'home' times together. Consequently, it is important to hear the women's voices, both those whose subjectivity is developed within the life partnership, those who work on-farm and off-farm and those who 'choose' or negotiate an exit from such a life situation.

In summary, while it seems clear that women do find coping strategies and 'spaces of resistance' (Allan, 2006; Fenwick & Somerville, 2006) there is a need to understand further by which processes cultural meanings are known, challenged and changed. Change may be constrained through women's silence within the patriarchal power structures of agriculture, with women's repositioning a result of personal and social 'resistance and voice' (Fenwick, 2000). This requires risk-taking and the confidence to be different and possibly to resist dominance and control. It is unclear though, whether the 'silent' women are silent by choice; and likewise whether those resisting are actually reacting to dominance. Insight into these issues will be explored from within the participants' lives.

One area of potential dominance is through ownership of farm assets. While many farms are legal partnerships between husband and wife, others have extended-family ownership and incoming wives have no legal land title; in effect they have no 'place'. This possible dichotomy of those with power and those more powerless is considered in the following section.

### **Private and public worlds: Partnership or incorporation**

Legal partnerships are often cited as an example of equality on farms although the sentiments captured in earlier research, may be more to the point. A 1989 New Zealand rural women's study cited by Webber and Rivers (1992, p. 35) notes that although "Over 50% of women in (the survey) are in legal partnerships with their partners and/or families ... Whether or not a woman is a legal partner in the farm it is likely that she will not think of it as "hers". Her partner will most likely see it as "his" farm ...." There is evidence that in New Zealand, since changes to matrimonial property law in 1976, there has been some increase in women's decision-making involvement, but it does not match the increase in the arrangement of farm partnerships (Pomeroy, 1995; Pomeroy, Burborough & Cumberworth, 1998; Rivers, et al, 1997; Webber & Rivers (1992). It seems also that farm women are less involved in major decision-making (Allan, 2006). Thus, it is difficult not to conclude that the increase in legal farm partnerships reflects the tax benefits that can be gained, rather than any acknowledgement of the worth of women's input, except on a superficial level. This, it would seem, is still a reality for many farm women in New Zealand as they take part in what is in often, legally at least, a single two-person career although often still seen as that of the husband's.

Traditionally, the two-person-career has in fact been the men's career supported by the wife, that is, in farming, with the woman as 'helper' and 'sounding board'. Influenced by the second wave of feminism, Papanek (1973) and Finch (1983) produced seminal work in which they theorised about the place of women within the careers of their marriage partners. It was here that Papanek (1973) coin the term 'two-person single career' where the wife participates in concrete ways, comes to identify with and quite literally becomes part of his career. She exposed and challenged the common view of the wife as the main supporter and carer in maintaining the home and achieving only 'vicariously' through her husband. This is not seen as a matter of 'choice' but structurally (and culturally) generated. Although Papanek's (1973) work was conducted almost thirty five years ago, there are relevant parallels within lives of many farm women today. Like, for example, the women's inability or difficulty in developing independent careers due to the demands and geography of their husband's chosen work. As a result, many highly educated farm women are living in a void with the frustrations of underutilised skills and abilities. Thus, while farm women are

frequently more highly educated than their husbands/partners (Bamberry, Dunn & Lamont, 1997) they often need to be satisfied with achieving vicariously through their husband's career. Although they are more involved in the farming business, at least in the private sphere, public recognition is still nominal and often has a feel of tokenism about it (Alston, 2000; 2003). Those speaking publicly and authoritatively about agriculture are still predominantly male, with women, seemingly, being reluctant to pursue such roles. Reasons for this reluctance may be related to patriarchal power or merely lack of interest in the politics of an institution that is remote from their authentic areas of interest.

While working as a facilitator with farming couples faced with 'exiting' (i.e. usually losing) their farms during the rural downturn of the late 1980s (in New Zealand), I observed that women often had private power while withdrawing in public contexts such as meetings with lawyers, accountants and other advisors. It seems that empowerment for those farm women had a definite boundary. They seemed to protect the public image, personal ego and subjective 'self' of 'the men', while foregoing their own; they had learned their boundaries. Interestingly, Papanek (1973) sees vicarious achievement "bound in transactions at the boundary between public and private spheres" (p. 855) indicating that recognition may be placed more in one sphere than the other. It is unclear where these spherical boundaries and recognitions lie but nominal status is often given publicly, as depicted in the increasing practice of calling farm wives 'farmers'. This seems to placate their position, and add value to some degree, by a type of formal recognition. And yet, the husbands or life-partners and the wives themselves by many accounts (Panelli, & Gallagher, 2003), still see them as helpers and sounding boards, positions with little sense of empowerment (Allan, 2005a). In other couple positions like, for example, a sole rural policeman's family, the husband's work is mainly outside the home boundary creating a more definite divide between public and private. For farming families, though, this public/private dividing line is blurred almost to the point of non-existence. Historically, farm women's positioning and empowerment was thought to be different for that very reason (Papanek, 1973). However, it seems it was more a result of rural folklore than anything of more substance. The women certainly worked very hard at both the outside farm work and farm household work but it would appear that it was little to do with conscious choice and more to do with fulfilling a largely imposed cultural role that was more their reality.

In summary, ownership is more than a legal issue. It encompasses an inherent spiritual possession, a central holding and title that give one not only responsibility but public power and status. While farm wives may have private power and be awarded nominal public recognition, it often has a feel of tokenism about it. By all accounts, achieving largely vicariously, through what is primarily the husband's career, is unfulfilling and often creates a personal void. Distinctions between public and private worlds blur and yet these boundaries are known instinctively, it seems, by the women. Moreover, having learned these boundaries they further reinforce them by protecting their husband's position; a responsibility likely learned through cultural constructs and social pressure.

Other couples, though, such as small business, rural professionals and co-preneur couples are often similarly entangled in work and personal relationships (Danes & Morgan, 2004). A comparison reveals some common issues with farm couples but also with quite distinct differences.

### **Co-preneur couples as comparison with farming couples and dual-career couples**

Co-preneurs are couples who are venturing to manage a business relationship concurrently with a personal relationship (Tompson & Tompson, 2000). These couples, like farming couples, live with a continual balancing act between work and family responsibilities. They face the difficulties of spending all of their time together. Interestingly, research into this phenomenon found that although the women are full partners in the joint business, they still have very traditional sex roles in both their business and marital relationships. For example, Tompson and Tompson (2000) reported 64% of wives have the responsibilities for food shopping opposed to 36% for dual-career couples. Their business roles are also very traditional with the positioning of co-preneur wives described as follower and supporter rather than in leadership, which is deferred to the husband (Marshack, 1994). These instances have parallels with many farm women who commonly take on the main domestic, family and household work; completing the more routine and caring work on-farm (e.g. raising young stock) while deferring commonly to the men for mechanical work and major financial and management decisions.

There are significant differences, though, between these co-preneur couples and farm couples. More commonly, the co-preneur couples have decided to go into

business together whereas farm women (wives) enter farming through marriage. Likewise, co-preneurs do not necessarily live on their business premises like the farms where work carries on, seemingly 24/7. And the co-preneurs are frequently new independent businesses not burdened with third or fourth generation ownership, which often comes with the farm-marriage. With co-preneurs equal ownership is common, while for extended farming families the new farm wife may not be included in the ownership structure but merely included through her husband and children. So, for co-preneurs often there is more free choice and a more ready choice to sell the business, if the couple so desires.

Another group with similar entanglements as couples is the rural general practitioner (G.P.) or medical doctor and his/her spouse. There is evidence from personal communications that partners of some rural doctors are forcing the doctors to leave their practices because the position does not meet their spouse's needs. Two of these spouses (personal communications) are male partners whose wives are the career professional. Although both these men had positions managing the local medical practices and assuming the major family caring role, they found their positions untenable, especially once the children became more independent. One male partner left the marriage while the other couple left the rural practice. Once again, though, these couple-partners have more ready access to individual work, are freer to change their work positions and to seek a practice in a city where both can pursue their careers.

In sum, farming couples have particular difficulties underpinned by particularly conservative traditions with cultural expectations and often embedded family histories, with its accompanying valued but possibly burdensome heritage. Interestingly, Marshack (1994) found that marital quality and business performance have a reciprocal relationship over time, with persistently low marital quality having a negative impact on the business performance. This indicates that in couple businesses, prioritising business over marriage will damage the business performance over time, which is very pertinent to the business approach to farming (Danes & Lee, 2004). While this present research does not seek to evaluate marriage relationships, they are an intrinsic part of the women's stories as they discuss their personal wellness and, in some cases, their marriage dissolutions. This approach, rather than evaluating quality of relationships, considers the women's sense of wellness and fulfilment throughout the farm-marriage.

### **Farm women and their sense of personal fulfilment**

As discussed, when a woman marries a farmer, she is expected culturally to embrace his career of farming, as well as (often) his family who are involved in the farming enterprise and the community in which they are to live. All this is embedded in a strong rural culture with distinct social and workplace expectations. Although increasingly women are also working off-farm, they are still expected to contribute to the farming enterprise, helping out on the farm, maintaining the farm household and contributing to the economic production. It's unclear though, how far the contributions of wives' are enforced or chosen (Finch, 1983). While Finch saw wives incorporation, through a marriage relationship, into men's work particularly coalesced in the relations of production in varying forms, one might have thought that societies have changed immensely since the 1980s. While this would seem to be the case in many urban life-partnerships, little progress seems to have been made within rurality in the last thirty years. While the public face of New Zealand farming promotes farming wives as financial partners in the farming business, who contribute through long hours working on-farm, are self-employed and legitimate farmers in their own right, the reality emerging from this study is quite different. While they may be rewarded similarly or often equally on paper and from an accounting perspective and they may 'wear' the public identity as 'farmer', their subjective view of 'self' tells another story. They commonly see themselves as playing the supportive role. As one woman said, "I look after Andy (husband) and the children, and support him, that is what I do" and she saw this, quite rightly as work, but temporary work. She told him this was a provisional period. She does not identify as a farmer but as a farm wife, a position which is a major source of conflict for her. She is encumbered with incongruence between her subjectivity (how she sees herself) and the identity of farmer's wife that has been imposed on her. Her sense of 'self' tells of intent, "I have to do this for a period but then I will have my turn." The issue of shared power is illusive then, as women await their turn, publicly 'playing the game' but privately having tense discussions regarding choice, wants and needs.

The question of choice, alternatives and power are critical to both women's public identities and their private subjective selves. Their reality consists of a world with transparent or fluid boundaries, multiple roles and complex identity work. This identity work requires ready "extensions of the body, space and time", a place where

the woman is often “balancing multiple situated identities as she moves in and out of public and private discourses” Edley (2001, p. 6). This dilemma is not necessarily confined just to the female partner as her male farming partner often has some cross-over, with childcare, for example. However, the reality may be that women are confined more by their choice of marriage or life partner, rather than choice of career. There is emerging evidence from across farm communities that with young farming men and women being educated to higher tertiary level, relationships are changing with men changing their career pathways more often, to accommodate the woman’s career. Power and gender relations are being challenged.

In all, ‘reciprocal empowerment’ (Darlington & Mulvaney, 2003) may be a useful model for farming enterprises as a discursive style of interaction grounded in reciprocity. Such a concept of power is socially constructed with personal authority providing heightened self-confidence that facilitates action. Moreover, personal authority enables powerful attributes of self determination, knowledge, action, choice and independence. To what extent farming women experience such power is unclear but the environment of farming with the public and private worlds blending together could lend itself to such a reciprocal empowerment. The woman, though, commonly enters the farm-marriage with little personal power. It takes a changing sense of self to identify and to include some of those identifiers in their personal subjectivities. This possible changing phenomenon and power sharing needs to be understood further to identify what is empowering these changes: culture or cognition. That is, in what ways are individual or social factors, and relationships between them, shaping these changes?

### **Farm women's subjectivity, identity and sense of self**

There are complex inter-relationships, then, between the concepts of identity, subjectivity and sense of self (Billett & Smith, 2006). While there is a strong drive to maintain one’s self, this self is constantly changing, sometimes subtly and sometimes more dramatically. From the perspective of this study, identity is seen as how others see the individual and reflect back that image to the subject. It entails work, place and appearance, though not only those concrete aspects, but also the dispositional self, or at least that which is visible to others. So, one may be seen as a farm woman, an academic and a former nurse who drives an older car and dresses in a mix of what

may be seen as urban and rural wear; and as a private person who has different interests, or a public person who challenges groups of people with new ways of thinking. Such aspects of public identity though, need to reflect to some degree how we see ourselves; our subjective selves. Others may misinterpret these factors and therefore present an image of our 'self' that we can't verify. This can be personally alienating. Yet, an individual's subjectivity, the familiar and 'known' self, is likewise fluid and changing and needs personal verification (Swann et al., 2002).

This subjective self entails our history-in-person. It is like a set of finger prints, bodylines and embodiments (Church et al., 2006; Somerville, 2006) as it tells the story of our very being. It consists of our early life, our middle life and our present life. It is more permanent, while being challenged by discovering that which we 'know' as 'truths' but are in fact, not. It is constantly being added to through our growing and evolving 'sense of self'. This 'sense of self' is the core self, bounded by how others see and project an image of the individual, our abilities, our dispositions but fully encompassed by the subjective view of self – who I am, my authentic self. Although driven by what is seen, by some, as the interdependent relations between personal agency and social influences (Billett, Smith & Barker, 2005), from early data there are indications of intent and action being directed by an individual's 'sense of self'; a transitional sense which either merges with the subjective self or is abandoned as inauthentic. While undoubtedly socially influenced, this sense then may direct action, "I can do it", "I need to do it because ..." or "I won't do it". If perceptive, one may critically analyse thought and behaviours, but without a strong sense of self one may feel entrapped, with life *happening to* the individual rather than living; remaining invisible, concealed to others (Church et al., 2006)

So, from early data, farm women as subjects, are often placed or place themselves, into environments that are patriarchal, family-powered, culturally-bound and geographically-limited, all of which likely have implications for their identity. While positionality is seen by some as fluid and shifting (Fenwick, 1999), these farm women's positionality often seems static. For many, their sense of self seems embedded in the cultural and social experiences created through discourse, signs, symbols and participation within the community and practice. The self, though, as a dynamic organism, is constantly changing through reflection, choice, life and work and so there is a drive for integration of subjectivities that is motivational and possibly transformative. There is a sometimes stifled and sometimes dynamic search for

coherence, authenticity and inner security (Fenwick, 1999). It may be experienced as tension, conflict and constant questioning of self and others. All of this is analogous to the Piagetian (Wadsworth, 1984) sense of seeking equilibrium or in von Glasersfeld's (1981, 1983, 1996) terms, a drive for 'fit' and 'viability'. This motivated or desperate struggle for selfhood may result in a retreat to safety and survival mode (Butler, 1997), which temporarily and somewhat falsely may bury a feeling of alienation.

In conclusion, such a sense of alienation may remain suppurating below the surface revealing itself as a general cultural malaise, numbness or sullenness in the woman (Fenwick, 2000). Early data from this study reveals narratives from many women who are experiencing such remoteness in their lives. Such women may be seen in farming circles as not being 'good farm wives' or women who shouldn't have married a farmer or worse, are seen as deficient persons. Thus, the blame and responsibility is placed squarely on the woman's shoulders. They can find themselves in a no-win situation as they are expected to 'fit' and 'live' a cultural stereotype, and as such are 'policed' by the community, which also involves women 'policing' other women about their practice of 'goodness'. Often dissenting women are 'silenced' in order to protect the comfort and beliefs of others; maintaining cultural norms while learning 'silence' and secrecy that some see as 'a shelter for power' (see: Cockburn, 1991; Gatenby & Humphries, 1999; Hazen, 2006). This can be an alienating experience as it is often difficult to distinguish between good social support and the 'policing' from other women both those of higher 'status' and those apprenticing to such status (see: Hekman, 1997; hooks & McKinnon, 1996; Mavin, 2006; D. E. Smith, 1997). Because of these implications, it is important to gain insight into such experiences, how they play out and how issues of blame and benefit are construed and exercised. Much of the women's knowledge of self, as a farm wife, comes from participating in the social practices that constitute farming culture within the farm family and the farming community.

### **Women, identity and work: learning as everyday activity**

The relationships among work, identity and learning through routine everyday lives, are dynamic and complex yet more often taken for granted. The formation and transformation of identity is likely enacted through both our conscious and unconscious acts, through cultural participation while engaging in everyday life

(Billett, 2006a; Rogoff, 1990; 2003). Likewise, knowledge is socioculturally-constructed through work-based learning and through everyday social activity (Billett & Pavlova, 2005; Fenwick, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). Since learning is rooted in participation, work relationships and complex relationships between context and identities, the challenge is to identify how learning is inter-related to cultural, social, individual and contextual factors (Billett & Smith, 2006; Etelapelto & Saarinen, 2006). It doubtlessly includes difference, continual subjective change, and power and gender relations, within work organisations and the pervading culture (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; 2004).

For farm women, their work is almost elusive and intangible. Their workplace includes farm and home, both inextricably linked, where they perform a myriad of tasks within the farming business i.e. on-farm and within the farm household. But this work is often not openly acknowledged as such nor financially rewarded but seen as part of the role of 'farm wife' – as cultural and social expectations. As the common use and understanding of the terms work and workplace assume paid work and are arguably based on power and political views of organised work, women in the roles of farm wives are faced with internal conflict and justification of their place and circumstances (Etelapelto & Saarinen, 2006). Such work and organisational structures and inherent power imbalances potentially exclude some learners from participation. This raises questions of validity and legitimacy of both work and working-knowledge for farm women, within the farm household and also as 'helpers' on the farm. This is particularly so since they are often engaging only at a peripheral participation level (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in work that neither stimulates, challenges or utilises their abilities. The subsequent lack of recognition and value becomes a challenge to the woman's sense of self, her position and status.

Subjectivity then, is a fluid phenomenon influenced by one's positionality and inter-related to cultural and contextual factors. Formation, maintenance and transformation of the 'self' are influenced by people and place including a person's workplace. Because farm women are often seen as merely 'helpers' in their workplace (R. Smith, 1991a, 1991b), such positionality may influence a vacuum within the woman's confused sense of self. Such a vacuum may become more apparent as the importance of their mothering role diminishes overtime, which may lead to women accepting, or actively seeking, new roles to add-value to their identity. They often miss the recognition and status awarded them in previous working positions. As one

farm woman said to me, “I was important when I was [a charge nurse at a base hospital] and people were interested in what I had to say but now [as a mother of two small children on a farm] I’m a ‘nothing’. No one is even interested in me – it’s like I don’t exist, apart from being the ‘wife of’ and ‘mother of’.” For her, this was a confronting realisation. It demonstrates a need to explore experiences dealing with changing subjectivities and accompanying recognition or lack of the same, along with changes in personal well-being.

In conclusion, the place of work and workplace in enabling or disabling a vision of ‘possible selves’ (Allan, 2006; Church et al., 2006; Billett, 2004a) is a little known phenomenon among farm women, their families and agricultural advisors. While, socioculturally, knowledge is considered to be constructed through participating in complex work and other relationships, it undoubtedly includes difference, continual subjective change and power and gender relations; both within work organisations and the pervading culture. Yet, for farm women, their work is almost elusive and intangible while placed within inherent power imbalances that potentially exclude some from full legitimate participation. This raises questions of validity and legitimacy of both work and working-knowledge for farm women, within the farm household and also as ‘helpers’ on the farm, considering that peripheral and disempowering status. Their ‘sense of place’, it seems, is also elusive.

### **Farm women and ‘place’**

There is a growing body of research into farm women and their ‘place’ within the structure and practice of farming. Research has encompassed the lack of recognition of women’s contribution and involvement within farm management and operations. Alston (1990, 1998a) argues that agricultural sources define what constitutes valid work from a gendered viewpoint that devalues women’s work and reinforces the invisibility of women on farms. Whatmore (1993), in research into family farms, similarly sees farm women’s work ‘eclipsed’ as the ‘family’ is accessed through and represented by the male farmer and his management and operational experiences. The place of farm women in these power relationships, then, remains largely invisible. This is due in part to the interrelation of work, home and family in the lives of farm women having unique characteristics (Carbert, 1995). Carbert sees these labour relations of farm women as being shaped through a marriage contract and while the

potential is for the family farm to be an egalitarian enterprise, the women's involvement is not reflected in power status.

Some, though, contest any sentiment that the rural women's case is somehow special or unique, or that "the forces of socialisation, opportunity and constraint, in some way bear more heavily on women in rural areas than in cities" (Henderson & Hoggart, 2003, p. 371). Henderson and Hoggart thus dispute that substantial inequalities of rural gender relations, regarding opportunity and constraint, exist. This viewpoint challenges rural researchers to rethink the rural specificity of gender relations particularly regarding ruralities and gender divisions of labour. Such critique denies definitions of 'rural' as 'cultural practices (or identity)' viewing ruralities as a 'mindset' or personal sentiment, which suggests 'choice'. This viewpoint in suggesting that such thinking probably exists within rural migrants to urban settings, would insinuate that the reverse may occur for in-migrant women to farming cultures i.e. that urban women migrating to farms, retain their urban outlook throughout their rural living. How this blending of differing life views and cultures is expressed through subjectivities as one 'becomes', is an area to be identified and pursued.

These in-migrant farm women, though, have restricted access to occupational choice. Their occupational trajectories are likely impacted by childrearing, marriage to a farmer, their geographical situation and limited choice, especially with the devolution of rural services and closure of rural schools and hospitals. This then requires women to either travel considerable distances to meet career needs or to take up some totally new work. Personally, I have identified some voluntary work as seminal in my trajectories. This might support the view that in-migrants change cultural expectations by acting on urban-based subjectivities that motivate new thinking (Alfred, 2006). If such risks are not taken, a lack of choice often means that many women take employment that mismatches or under exploits their formal qualifications or work experience and former career. But as discussed, a subjective drive for a congruent self may be transformative rather than a negative imposition, if other possibilities are seen as part of the woman's likelihood. Through risk-taking, rural women may experience a range of possibilities, unthought-of except for their geographical position and isolation. Limited choice, from this view, may be motivating (Iyengar, 1999). While these options may not have been their choice in other circumstances, they may be stimulating and challenging alternatives, at times

even life-changing (e.g. furthering education by distance or representing their province on a District Health Board).

Consequently, it is necessary to understand the sense of self and identity as well as the intentionality of women who are ‘in-migrants’ to rurality through marriage, amalgamating non-rural values and identities with newly acquired rural values and identity. This includes how women engage with a range of opportunities afforded them and how they negotiate these opportunities. To do so, it is necessary to disentangle the trajectories and subjectivities of farm women through divergent and emergent data gathering and analysis. This is important because without doing this, the very basis of a rural woman’s sense of well-being can be misunderstood and negatively impacted upon. While the merging of urban and rural, social and personal sentiments and cultures may positively influence cultural changes over time, it may be a source of constant personal struggle and tension, for an extensive period. Personal outcomes of this prolonged incohesion may be wide ranging. Entrapped women may feel victimised and confused by their sullen or unhappy disposition while their husbands/partners with equal confusion may treat them as failures or judge them to be not making an adequate effort. Further insights into personal struggles may help inform possibilities and potential strategies for understanding farm women’s perspectives and supporting their endeavours in belonging often to a culture remote from one’s ‘self’.

### **Combining cultural sentiments and expectations within identity: a tangle of tensions**

A sense of belonging is predicated by one’s knowledge of the culture to which one seeks to belong (Hall, 1995; Suvin, 2005). This knowledge is, likely, constructed through participation in the cultural activities (Salling Olesen, 2006). In the case of farm women this entails the farm-marriage, the farm workplace, the farm household, extended farming family and the wider community. For in-migrant urban or city women, these changes can be immense. One woman described it as being “a completely different world ... like living in a foreign country with a whole new language and way of life (and with) so much to learn.” Understanding this ‘learning to belong’ requires knowledge of how these two very different identities merge to enable congruence of subjectivities in forming an authentic self. A ‘sense of inner identity’ as

described by Erikson (1968) requires congruence between how a person conceives their self, how they perceive others see them and the expectations others have of them. This view of identity while recognising personal choice and agentic ability in constructing a sense of identity, also binds exercise of choice together with the views and expectations of others. It requires a blending of sociocultural influences into structures of cognition (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Penuel and Wertsch see Erikson's (1968) primary concern with individual choice made in response to sociocultural realities rather than sociocultural influences shaping individual choices. This view affords individual agency authority of choice albeit within sociocultural contexts.

For in-migrants though, it seems to take considerable time for knowledge of choice to become authentic. During this often lengthy and tumultuous transitional-identity phase, individuals may feel like they are going through the motions rather than being 'real'. These individuals' sense of self may feel alienated and shackled by cultural expectations. It seems that while mentorship facilitates this fragile upheaval, such support is evasive for farming women possibly due to loyalty to patriarchal cultural-constraints. Therefore, understanding how farm women manage these transitions to new norms and who or what collaborates with or inhibits this formation and transformation of self, (Billett, 2006b; Salling Olesen, 2006) is vital to advancing intercultural knowledge.

Entanglement of person, place, work, home and production may be a considerable source of conflict for the incoming farm woman as she attempts to make sense of her new world. A sense of alienation may manifest as a tangle of tensions in adjusting to new 'norms' within the "difficulties in intercultural integration" and accompanying conflicts of "cultural and generational identities" (Del Rio & Alvarez 1995, p. 216). The question of whether ensuing changes are superficial or more fundamental and whether old beliefs and identity systems disappear within emotional, mental and social difficulties is doubtful. It is not clear from cultural research how two or more sets of cultural ecologies combine in forming new amalgamated subjectivities. When combining two very distinct and different ways of life, which bring with them their particular sociocultural or sociohistorical influences, it is thought that there may be a point of intersection which is agentic in action; where the individual constructs authentic, subjective thought relative to his/her prehistory (Del Rio & Alvarez, 1995).

Likely, a range of cultural media influence women in 'becoming' and in feeling a sense of 'belonging'. It seems there is a subtle change from such media that over time draws women new to farming into believing they are 'at home'. Over time, they may come to 'belong' more to the new culture than the old (Hall, 1995; Lave, 2001). It seems that individuals move through these artefactual learning-hierarchies (Cole, 1995) almost linearly although with some overlaps. For example, through a process of learning to prepare the 'right' food, to dress 'correctly', to raise animals and cope with machinery, one is then able to increasingly interact in an informed manner, lending one some legitimacy. Armed with a moderate level of knowledge of the culture and with the 'right' attitude, one may then be able to infiltrate this new world to a point of acceptance and with a sense of belonging. This 'walking the walk' and 'talking the talk', though, does not afford one full membership. That only comes with time and that time may take several generations in the case of relatively closed rural communities. It is claimed locally that it takes three generations to really belong and in fact those with 'original settler' status in their family heritage will always have more ownership and status in the community than those later arrivals. However, those who make the transition are afforded a certain status and reserved membership.

Now, though, many New Zealand farming communities are experiencing transformations in their traditional bases with changes in pastoral use. Some communities are being totally transformed by, for example, an upsurge in the wine industry or dairying. These industries have assumed land traditionally farmed as food and fibre production (e.g. sheep and beef). Both bring new cultures, different opportunities and new problems with them with both attracting new sets of staff for their labour forces. An array of similar changes have reorganised the social structures of farming communities. Traditionally, community groups such as the Country Women's Institute (CWI) and Women's Division of Federated Farmers, (Wdff) now Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ), have been influential in acculturating rural women to their expected roles, while providing a supportive network. With the deconstruction of rural communities since the 1980s, such groups have become less relevant and less influential in the lives of New Zealand farm women. Their memberships have struggled for numbers and for their very existence. However, despite this, these organisations still have considerable political influence and lobbying power on political matters, often from a conservative viewpoint. This is in itself an issue as, while representing farm women publicly, these organisations don't

necessarily reflect the views of farm women as a whole or, as questioned in early data from this research, even those of their own membership. Given the array of factors that shape these struggles and conflict between and amongst farm women, there is a need to identify what support and interest groups have been influential in supporting lives and changing the subjectivities of participants.

Personal conversations with farm women reveal conflicts of identity as some feel restricted by cultural and social norms and limited by conventional options and expectations. Such cultural oppression results in fragmentation and lack of cohesion, with loss of connection between the self and everything else, which results in a dynamic struggle for selfhood and its relationship to a particular culture (Fenwick, 2000). It seems that the place of farm women while changing on the surface is not changing in the 'bedrock'. Culturally, it still requires the woman to 'become' a certain person, and to 'play the game' commanding committed and particularised engagement. While some farm women have grown up on their parents' family farms and so are rural through birth and nurturance, others come from an urban childhood and youth and are 'urban' in ways of experiencing everyday life, language and accompanying social expectations. The latter are required to develop a cultural understanding and standing within the community chosen, albeit as a condition of their rite of passage (i.e. marriage to a local farmer). Such transformations require concerted and intentional efforts in order to produce trajectories, while forming social relations that enable what may be described as inter-cultural inhabitants (Lave 2001). These women may experience a dilemma or tension in such cross-cultural social situations or gulfs. A sense of incohesion may accompany different expectations as they attempt to integrate old cultural norms with their newly acquired but largely unknown cultural and societal expectations. Integration may be difficult if the new culture dominates, requiring considerable effort to avoid feelings of alienation.

Identity may be more individual in urban settings as opposed to a somewhat collective and even more distinctive and recognisable identity in rural communities (see: Markus, H. R. & Kitayama, S., 1991). Farming people are often recognised from their dress, language and manner of speaking, their accent and even their body stance and body language. Certainly, their bigger and dustier cars are often a giveaway. These collective and social norms can be broken down further into areas of a provincial or geographical area or type of farming with which a person may be identified. Construction of such social and cultural signs and behaviours come about

through a process of positionality i.e. being positioned within a social setting with a particular cultural identity. As a means of transition, a 'cultural lag' may be created in maintaining some replicated aspects of the earlier known culture.

In conclusion, this process of 'becoming' part of an unknown culture and merging the old known culture with the new is not well understood. For farm women, subsequent struggles and tensions are often not admitted to and therefore are not obvious or accepted; in fact they are unknown. It is important to extricate such experiences and to build a genesis of understanding of how urban women have become rural, and whether or how, as in-migrant rural women, they are different from those born and bred on farms. Such knowledge, of cross-cultural conflict with changing subjectivities, is needed to gain insight into cultural change through the struggles and successes of in-migrant women; a concept not well recognised or implied.

### **Invisibility and alienation silencing 'self'**

A reluctance of farming women to adopt a feminist framework is acknowledged, arguably sustaining women in disempowered positions (Haslam-McKenzie, 1998). This is possibly due to their very genuine passion for agriculture compounded by a lack of confidence and self-esteem due to their invisibility. This invisibility is seen as a 'silencing' of rural women's voices (Alston, 1998b), which urges calls for major changes, including attitudinal shifts, courage and conviction (Broad, 1998). This present research seeks to increase the visibility of the farm women participants through their own experiences, issues and authentic voices. It seeks insight into how these women are realising their 'self' in the milieu of farming work and life.

From this discussion and from my personal experience as a farm woman of 35 years, it is clear that there is ambivalence between fulfilling the role of a 'farm wife' or 'farm woman' and fulfilling needs of 'self'. Cultural constructs, coupled with personal desire to succeed as a farm woman, exert an often subtle and sometimes blatant, pressure on farm women to comply with the expectations of the often adopted culture. Such an ongoing dilemma may drive personal needs from the equation, fragmenting subjectivities. Over time, these images of self may be interwoven to a point where the early identity is barely recognisable and yet the incumbent, transitional identity is not authentic. This may manifest as a sense of unwellness,

unhappiness and resentment. From early evidence in this study, it seems that at times the woman is constrained into a prolonged transition where she can neither go back nor go forward. In these cases critical action is needed by the woman to rescue her very being; sometimes to literally save her life.

For some women though, and in summary, it is clear that through successful negotiation, the transitional identity is reformed or transformed to a new authentic self as an alliance with past, present and future. In the cases where truncation and mutation occurs the tension and challenge of change is not voiced or indeed, openly recognised. Though contextual, socially afforded and subjective, failure of identity formation is seen as the woman's problem. She hasn't tried hard enough. Therefore, it is important to 'hear' such stories in order to understand their process, their abilities or inabilities to assert their 'self' and their experiences of survival or transformation.

### **Purposes for enquiry**

Through merging a review of literature with practical examples and vignettes, then, it is proposed to investigate farm women, their identity, place, agency and trajectories of self. It is important to understand how these women construct and transform their sense of self to engage in farming life. This likely will require an understanding of their individual sense of self, that they construct while engaging in farm life, and how that relationship of self and farm-life transforms over time. Farm women's identity is commonly seen as captured by their dominating role as a 'farm wife'. Their 'self', as an individual, may be dominated to a point of non-recognition as they are suppressed by their roles within their life partnership (marriage), their farming responsibilities and cultural expectations. Understanding how a selection of women have coped with this overwhelming absorption of 'self' is vital to the future of family farming, considering the intrinsic role played by women in the success of such farming enterprises (Allan, 2002). It is not merely a question of how labour is divided or who has high profile positions in farming politics, it is also a question of how women on farms are experiencing their lives. It requires knowledge of what changes women have made to their 'self' in 'becoming' a 'farmer's wife', how have they maintained their 'self' over time and how they have transformed their 'self' either within or without the farm-marriage.

It is becoming increasingly clear that women's attitudes to farming are intergenerational with mothers possibly influencing their daughters' life trajectories both in education and career choices. According to O'Hara (1998), mothers themselves may encourage their daughters to consider other choices, having often actively discouraged them from following the tension and conflicts of life they have experienced themselves as farm women. These choices in turn, influence other options indicating individual choice as being socially influenced. Through a 'history in person' approach, this cultural study of farm women focuses on their experiences and processes of 'becoming' and their developing subjectivities through discourse and embodiments within their worlds. It explores how they transform their social (farm) practices and their culture through life-challenges as 'farm wives' and in other positions, while at the same time transforming (or being transformed) themselves.

Subjectivity is advanced as a fluid phenomenon influenced by one's positionality and inter-related to cultural and contextual factors. Formation, maintenance and transformation of the 'self' are influenced by people and place including a person's workplace (Billett, 2006a). Because farm women are often seen as merely 'helpers' in their workplace (R. Smith, 1991a, 1991b; Allan, 2005a), such positionality may influence a vacuum within the woman's confused sense of self. Such a vacuum may become more apparent as the importance of their mothering role diminishes which, in turn, may lead to women accepting their position or actively seeking new roles to add-value to their identity. Alternatively, they may choose to exit farming and their marriage in a search for a more authentic self. Merging of urban and rural values, social and personal sentiments and cultural expectations may be a positive personal outcome while influencing cultural change over time. However, the reality for many farm women may be a source of constant personal struggle and tension. Lack of recognition of their 'place' or 'plight' may lead entrapped women to either subconsciously or consciously feel victimised and confused by their sullen or unhappy disposition. Insight into a range of such personal struggles will help inform possibilities and potential strategies for these and ensuing farm women.

The process of 'becoming' part of an unknown culture and merging the old known-culture with the new is not well understood. For farm women, subsequent struggles and tensions are not often admitted to and therefore are not obvious or accepted. It is important to extricate such experiences and to build an understanding of how urban women have become rural and whether or how as in-migrant rural

women, they are different from those born and bred on farms. Such knowledge, of cross-cultural inner conflict with changing subjectivities, is needed to gain insight into cultural change through the struggles and successes of in-migrant women; a concept not well recognised or understood.

From this discussion and from my personal experience as a farm woman of more than thirty five years, it is clear that there is ambivalence between fulfilling the role of a 'farm wife' or 'farm woman' and fulfilling the needs of the 'self'. Cultural constructs, coupled with personal desire to succeed as a farm woman, exert an often subtle and sometimes blatant pressure on farm women to comply with the expectations of the, often, adopted culture. A constant dilemma may be submerged as personal needs become fragmented while identities are interwoven to a point where the early identity no longer exists and yet the transitional identity is not authentic. Then over time that transitional identity is further constructed either to an authentic identity or to an alienated identity, which neither resembles the previously known self nor is congruent with the self they know in reality. It seems that for some persons this cycle of transition is truncated at some point or a mutation occurs resulting in a lack of 'place'. For farm women, such dilemmas are not often spoken about or recognised. It is unclear how this process evolves but it is seen as contextual and subjective. Failure of identity formation is seen as the woman's problem; she hasn't tried hard enough. It is important, therefore, that this in-depth study of farm women seeks new meanings of the women's trajectories and their life-work experiences.

Ultimately, this research seeks to understand the reality of a number of farm women case studies as participants, supported by a larger cultural ethnographic participant observation. Insight is sought into their sense of fulfilment or otherwise, and their contribution to society as well as to their own well-being. In considering this reality, this research explores the concepts of individual agency and social agency in relation to whether a person changes their culture or the culture changes them. This is vital because it is only through such an understanding, that it becomes possible to gain insight into the meaningfulness of life trajectories and the intentionalities that drive a person's ability to maintain and transform their 'self'. These abilities are constructed within cultural experiences, affordances and constraints, which are often imposed on them rather than chosen. The relationships between these concepts and points of intersection can be elaborated through analysing personal histories and personal life trajectories.

In all, this chapter has argued that there is ambivalence between fulfilling the role of a 'farm wife' or 'farm woman' and fulfilling the needs of the 'self'. It proposes that cultural constructs, coupled with personal desire to succeed as a farm woman, often exert a subtle and sometimes blatant, pressure on farm women to comply with cultural expectations to the detriment of self. Such an ongoing dilemma may drive personal needs from the equation, fragmenting subjectivities. Over time, these images of self may be interwoven to a point where the early identity is barely recognisable and yet the incumbent, transitional identity is not authentic. This may manifest as a sense of unwellness, unhappiness and resentment. From early evidence in this study, it seems that, at times, the woman is constrained into a prolonged transition where she can neither go back nor go forward. These critical conflicts between farm women's more public identity and more private 'sense of self' contribute to further tensions compounded by senses of invisibility and alienation that, in effect, silence 'self'. Through outlining the purposes for enquiry and the research focus, it argues the case for critical research into the changing subjectivities of selected farm women in New Zealand.

### **Research Focus**

Farm women's changing subjectivities as a research focus, then, is stimulated by farming men in a previous study (Allan 2005a) repeatedly describing their wives as 'helpers and 'sounding boards'; terms that fail to empower the women or endow them with anything more than partial participation. Reflecting on this, I realised that as a farm woman of more than thirty years, I had no idea what was happening in the lives of other farm women 'out there', suggesting a persistent invisibility in respect of public face and position of status. I knew I was more than a 'helper' and 'sounding board' and suspected many (or most) others were also. It was this concern that motivated a need to illuminate decisions towards, and processes of, formation and reformation of personal subjectivity within the women's roles as farm women along with transformations within their farming lives, personal lives and rural culture. Burning questions arose of 'what is happening to the sense of self and identity of all those women out there on farms whose contributions likely go beyond those used to describe them i.e. as sounding boards and helpers?' 'How did they 'become' who they

are?’ ‘How are they maintaining their ‘selves’ as individuals?’ And ‘How are they transforming their selves over time?’

Issues shaping the selection of the sample of farm women (as the underpinning case studies) ranged widely. They included aspects of and importance of type of upbringing; differences between different sectors of agriculture; the value of off-farm work; education level and influences; effects of dissolution of marriage; urban v rural influences; age, lifespan and cohort influences.

In preview, this research, has uncovered a disquietening lack of ‘sense of fulfilment’ and a concerning void in many women’s lives. While disclosures represented not only depressive symptoms and levels of despair but at times a disconcerting learned acceptance and sense of entrapment, it also displayed encouraging evidence of capacity towards resistance to subjection and drive to self-transformations.

Chapter Four – Investigating farm women’s sense of identity: A methodological orientation - discusses the philosophical approach to methodology including auto/ethnography, personal histories, interviews and feminist methodology, while outlining ethical considerations and potential personal dilemmas of including the ‘researcher as subject’. Chapter Five - Investigating farm women’s changing subjectivities: research design, method and analyses - focuses on rigor in research design, methods, data generation, analysis and emergence of theory grounded in data, while advancing arguments for and against the place of validity and reliability in qualitative research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### INVESTIGATING FARM WOMEN'S SENSE OF IDENTITY: A METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

*To write an ethnography requires at a minimum some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written-about group. These are the stuff of culture, and they are what the fieldworker pursues. Such matters represent the ways of being and seeing for members of the culture examined and for the fieldworker as a student of that culture. ... this depiction must begin with intensive, intimate fieldwork during which the culture will surely be revealed. (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 13)*

This chapter advances an orientation to investigating farm women's sense of self using auto/ethnographic and ethnographic approaches. It holds that the researcher's experiences as a farm woman both shape and, importantly, contribute to the selection of methodology in order to investigate the lives, senses of self and transitions of farm women. The term auto/ethnographic (with the forward slash) is used throughout this text to denote a symbiosis of my personal involvement with that of wider ethnography (Stanley, 1992). This chapter comprises an account of deliberation about the selected methodological perspectives and approach to the research, which are presented here as an orientation to what is detailed in Chapter 5. That chapter focuses more on detail of research design, recognition and sustainability of credibility, along with a discussion on the strengths and limitations of the research. Viewpoints that both support and challenge the use of a feminist perspective are discussed, as well as deliberations on the merits of using auto/ethnography as the principal and guiding method. Approaches engaged throughout, are those associated with auto/ethnography, personal histories, interviews and feminist methodology. These extend to the case for participant selection, ethical considerations and potential personal dilemmas of 'researcher as subject'. Thus, orientations regarding feminist methodology, auto/ethnography and histories-in-person are advanced here.

#### **Facing the dilemma of 'how': Including researcher as subject**

The process of identifying and constructing research questions to elaborate and understand the experiences of farming women was considered in tandem with a

consideration about the orientation of the investigation. Life histories of farm women were identified as the most effective way to explore their experiences of farming culture. The histories needed to include their experiences as new farm 'wives' and those concerned with maintenance of 'self' through their life trajectories, while seeking to identify transformations, influences, tensions and conflicts. As foreshadowed in Chapter 1, the interest in, and impetus for, this research arose from my own life experiences as a farm woman, as an educator and also as a researcher and research student. It became increasingly clear, through discussing my proposal with others that at least part of the momentum for this research related to my own experiences over the years in transforming my 'self'. These experiences were set within the change in rural New Zealand culture during my time in a farm-marriage i.e. from 1969 and ongoing.

Early on, in preparing the proposal for this dissertation, I got 'cold feet' and almost veered away from women as subjects moving, rather, towards researching farm practices as social practices. This would include farm men and staff members. My concerns were precipitated by two considerations. Firstly, I wanted my research to be valued by my industry i.e. farming/agriculture, and I thought that the agricultural industry would value the 'practice' approach more readily, thus giving results more ready legitimacy and recognition. Secondly, I had a niggling fear of my investigation being 'captured by feminists'. This fear arose through engaging with the work of other female researchers and my limited knowledge of feminism. This orientation was quite outside my own experience of living in, what one young woman visiting my home observed as, "quite a 'blokey' world". However, with reflection and on discussing this dilemma with a young rural woman, I recognised it for what it was: simply a fear of the challenge, the unknown and facing the hard questions. She said something to me along the lines of "Lord forbid that we should actually look at life from the viewpoint of farming women after more than 100 years in New Zealand of reading about the male perspective. It's time to put a dent in the ledger and challenge the industry; to have the courage to tell women's experiences as they see it". So that part was settled, a women's perspective and a women's study it would be. And so the research topic was set.

When engaging with literature in making a case for the research, my personal experiences regularly came to the fore. That my own experiences were valuable and needed to be incorporated into the research in some way became increasingly

apparent, to both my supervisors and me. In effect, I have lived the culture, changes and tensions to be researched. All this was expected to enable legitimate and ready access to participants. This provided a starting point for an engagement with literature on research methods, and it is this engagement that is discussed here in relation to the selection of an appropriate research orientation.

### **Different views of auto/ethnography**

In preview, a consideration of approaches, eventually led me to select the broad approach of auto/ethnography as a genre of writing and research. Such an approach can be seen as “displaying multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner 2000 p. 740). In a process of reflective gaze, the researcher as a full insider and ‘native’ to the culture is already a legitimate and full member in the culture being studied. The literature offers many types of ethnographic research within which this inquiry could fall. These include *indigenous researcher*, studying a setting of which the researcher is already a member; the *complete-member researcher* (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991); and *reflexive ethnography* (Etherington, 2004), in which the researcher’s personal experience becomes important primarily in how it ‘illuminates the culture under study’ and where the researcher’s experience ‘may be studied along with’ the other participants. Thus, in all these approaches, one’s own culture, as researcher and participant, enables one as researcher to reflexively use one’s self in looking more deeply at other and self-other interactions (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). While the term auto/ethnography will be used in this current study, the approach encompasses aspects of all of these options along with many others.

This approach merges well with the feminist approach of D.E. Smith (1987, 1999) who has validated the use of personal knowledge, experience and stories, while legitimising subjective involvement in one’s research. She advances the term ‘*institutional*’ *ethnography*, which looks from within the experiences of those marginalised towards the centre of power and control (De Vault, 1999). It, by recognising the individual’s everyday knowledge, works towards a more equitable society (Campbell & Gregor, 2002; D.E. Smith 2005). Thus, D.E. Smith (1987, 1999, 2005) sees such approaches meeting the objectives of feminist research and feminist writing.

Auto/ethnography as used in this research combines that of the researcher (auto) with ethnography while not privileging the researcher's input over that of the other participants. Thus, it is a layered approach to social and cultural observance through the accounts of all participants. While it is common for auto/ethnography to be written in the first person, it became clear early on that for this study there would be multi-layering of voices for reasons including issues of anonymity. An attempt is made to marry the use of the first person for linkage text, observations as researcher, and for reflective writing and second person, at times, for myself as an unidentified farm woman. As the farming communities, upon which the research is centred, are often small, it could be quite easy for neighbours and wider practice-connections to be identified through a process of elimination. A clear declaration is made, though, that I am one of the participants and in most accounts, I am freely identified as myself while at other times my experiences are more generalised and included along with others as 'one farm woman', to protect the anonymity of others. Continual reflexive accounts of my 'self' were journaled for inclusion as a range of discourse and narrative data. An ongoing challenge is in discovering how my 'self' is best located in the text, while balancing objectivity and subjectivity.

### **To analyse or not: A question of objectivity**

The tension between objectivity and subjectivity in analysis and text require riding the boundaries and working the spaces between passion and intellect, autobiography and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Oakley, 2000; D.E. Smith, 1999). As an insider, this tension includes myself with the other participants as 'us' and yet I move outside in analysis when I, along with other participants, become 'they'. This allows for objectivity in analysis, not setting my life story or status apart from others while possibly allowing for some generalisations amongst cases. Tierney (2002) calls for narrative studies to "maintain a central concern for agency, praxis, and the 'other', rather than focusing on a cathartic I-centric agency of the self" (p. 385). He is critical of obsessive use of the "I", not as use of first person in the text but as unreflexive use of one's voice. In my research, a personal awareness is stated of placing the 'Other' (participants) as foremost and privileged in pursuing ongoing understandings and possibilities of social and cultural transformation. The multi-voiced text, as collaboration between all participants within the study, is expected to

paint a vibrant picture in capturing their everyday lives and issues. My place then, while salient, remains secondary to the wider ethnography.

While some accounts promote a pure form of narrative ethnography in which authors “privilege stories over analysis,” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.745) thereby allowing and encouraging the reader to participate and interpret the story for themselves, this study aspires to analyse and interpret the women’s personal histories, while recognising the existence of multiple realities. This may be problematic at times given the possible distortions of memory and recognising that “narrative is a story about the past and not the past itself”. As such, it often comprises “multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (ibid, p. 739). This means that as researcher, acute awareness of meanings is further crystallised through delving deeper into responses by use of sensitive probes, prompts and gestures. In this way that ‘not being said’ may be revealed. As an ‘insider’ with cultural knowledge and a certain ‘knowing’ it is hoped that a reciprocal confidence helps capture a depth of narrative that reflects what one farmer (Allan, 2005a) described as “the real oil”; that which is ‘known’ to be coming from the heart or inner self. Hence, the need to be mindful of searching out the ‘black swans’ (i.e. those exceptions ascertained through constant comparatives) in validating any claims. Therefore, researching individual histories-in-person requires a balance of rigour and imagination. These renderings are then further reflected upon both as subjective accounts and also as how they might be perceived by others. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that in exploring these women’s realities of work and social communities, some experiences undoubtedly are edited by time or through a sense of privacy. This stresses the need for a confidential and trusting relationship between researcher and other participants.

The intention of this study is to make sense of participants’ experiences by conveying some meaning both as individuals and also as a collective of individuals within the specific culture of farming. To this end, the stories of farm women, who identify with a range of subjectivities and experiences, are explored requiring constant management of the subjective/objective dilemma; that of moving inside and outside the narratives as a participant and/or observer. Both processes are vital to effectiveness of ethnography but faced often as a crisis of representation (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Etherington, 2004; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Plummer, 2001; Tierney & Lincoln, 1997). The ability to move outside the intensity of the setting is necessary, in order to analyse experiences, thoughts and feelings from a cultural

perspective and as socially constructed processes. (It is postulated that personal understanding is essential to trust). Consequently, while some objectivity in analysis is seen traditionally as important for validity, it is becoming more common to accept that in social science there is a human response, that is “coloured by our perceptions” (Wise 1998, p. 16). Yet, within these restrictions, by using a process of constant comparatives in data generation and analysis, repeated patterns are revealed further legitimising emerging concepts, themes and categorical knowledge, leading to emergent theory (Charmaz, 2000).

Dealing with the serious responsibility of anonymity is an ongoing challenge. Some details in the data may be fictionalised to camouflage the person’s identity while still conveying the meaning behind the narrative/event (Clifford, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). Not often, but at times, participants’ stories are modified for anonymity while retaining meaning. My family and neighbours, practice colleagues, friends and others have the same right to privacy as do those members of other participants’ families confirming the decision for pseudonyms for all participants. Within these boundaries life stories are used, as in feminist ethnography, to make sense of life as participants experience it.

### **A feminist ethnography**

Dorothy Smith (1987, 1999) introduced ‘institutional ethnography’ as a sociological method incorporating feminist ideology that values personal experience in an individual’s everyday world. It comprises beginning in “an actual situation and exploring the actual relations that organise it”; it discovers how it works locally before moving to broader generalities (D.E. Smith, 1987, p. 148). Both the institutional ethnographic and auto/ethnographic approaches have common aims to assist in understanding everyday life. Such modes enable the social to be written as people lived it, in a search for knowing ‘lived lives’ and constructing new meanings from them. D.E. Smith (1987, 1999) is credited with developing a method of social analysis that is reflexive to the ‘material contours’ of people’s lives. Foucault and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and their intermingling of discourse, action, social and language, along with senses and experience, influence her theory.

Traditional, objectively-based, methodological approaches, seen by D.E. Smith (1987) and others as based on the historic men’s universal standpoint, although

arguably less relevant in 2007, still requires some acknowledgement. This historical standpoint of objective research, based on a positivist viewpoint, is historically seen as the 'hard' and 'real' science as opposed to 'soft' social science. From this viewpoint, validity and reliability require cancelling the subjectivity of the knower thereby removing the knowing to an abstract conceptual plane (D.E. Smith, 1987). From a feminist viewpoint it is criticised as destructive to the knower's position, in effect suppressing and destroying the personal expressions and connections to underlying relations. As a response to personal criticisms of early sociology, she developed her version of social analysis underpinned by a need to understand relations between and among men and women and the connections of these relations to economics. It encompasses both work and life experiences and conditions. Knowledge of everyday activities are seen as critical to discovering the importance of women's particular space (D.E. Smith, 1987) in an attempt to discover the inter-relationships between and among that positioning and the social and economic processes underlying it (Campbell, 2003; D.E. Smith, 1987, 1999).

Presently, we know little about issues of space and place of farm women (i.e. where they 'fit' and where they 'belong' or ultimately where they want or need to be) in relation to social and economic pressure and priorities in farming practices. These are seen as critical issues for women farming due to personal relationships (e.g. marriage) rather than choice. Relocating the researcher 'inside', with the privilege of confidence of the women being studied, seems an obvious choice of method; one promoted by some early feminists in the mid 1970s as they unapologetically supported the women's position (D.E. Smith, 1987). The use of Schutz' (1970) sentiments that we live in a world not of our own making (Campbell, 2003, D.E. Smith, 1987) is particularly pertinent to this present study of farm women. As described progressively throughout this thesis, these women commonly live in worlds not necessarily chosen or even understood at the time of their marriage. At their time of 'choosing', they have little reality of what being a 'farmer's wife' will mean to their lives, their life choices and options.

This study, then, seeks to explore the knower's own experience (D.E. Smith, 1987, 1999). That includes all experience as central to research, including that of the researcher as an insider and participant. This recognition of the researcher, as an active participant, legitimates knowledge from the 'inside', thereby lessening risks of misinterpretations through separating concepts from the participants' experiences and

their expressions. This sociological approach to studies of women (and others oppressed or subjugated in some way) seeks to develop a method of analysis that does not dissect and destroy the knower's subjectivities, everyday experiences and their worlds, but validates their knowledge by including their narratives as data in their selves. While D.E. Smith's (1987) particular standpoint has been compared and discussed (Longino, 1993), challenged, (Hekman, 1997), and rebutted (Harding, 1997; D.E. Smith, 1997), it is considered "robust and complex enough to admit multiple standpoints" (Longino, 1993, p. 205). As such, it has been seminal in adding to a theory of knowing and knowledge from a feminist viewpoint and, particularly, from the standpoints of less empowered women. Through developing a sociology for women, it acknowledges and legitimises their perspectives of everyday living and working. However, caution and diligence is required here, because reality is too complex to always accept at initial face-value (Stanley, 1990). This research then takes the stance that constant-comparative analysis, along with theoretical sampling to seek possible refutation of emerging theory, will add to robust, credible and sustainable research. A mix of technical and academic knowledge, driven by humanness and urgency to 'know' the farm women's everyday life experiences, is a compelling platform from which this study is launched. Others, though, question the validity of feminist methodology itself, as discussed next.

### **Questioning feminist methodology**

However, despite what has been proposed above, feminist methodology has its critics, particularly questioning the need for different methodology based on gender issues and also the more subjective approach to valid knowledge. For instance Hammersley (1992) questions concepts commonly accepted within feminist ideology as intrinsic to a feminist approach to research. He challenges "the ubiquitous social significance of gender, the validity of experience as against method, the rejection of hierarchy in the research relationship, and the adoption of the emancipation of women as the goal of research and the criterion of validity" (Hammersley 1992, p.187). He also questions the need and justification for a separate approach when, from his perspective, non-feminist research literature provides for the ideas and such separation may only lead to divisiveness. (Herein resides an echo of the rejection of feminist discourse by many farm women as it is seen as being anti-male when such 'divisiveness', for women

themselves, may in fact be a move towards liberation from patriarchal domination). Further, he suggests that feminists challenge social research methodology generally and specifically through engagement and debate within common and traditional research paradigms.

An opposing viewpoint supports “a recognition of the diversity and complexity of people’s lives” (Williams, 1993, p. 585) and a call for legitimising women’s ways of knowing (e.g. Belenky et al., 1986/1997) through engagement in and understanding their particular everyday worlds. Ramazanoglu (1992) likewise, supports feminist research as a means of understanding and transforming gender relations. She questions the implication that there is one particular case for feminist methodology. Ramazanoglu promotes the need to “understand the problems which feminist methodologists have raised” regarding social science research while legitimising women’s knowledge and empowering their positions (1992 p. 210). Likewise Gelsthorpe (1992) concludes that there is no single ‘feminist line’ on the issues raised by Hammersley (1992) instead calling for recognition of “the ‘subjectivity’ of those who participate in research” (p. 217). She sees the emphasis on experience *in* method as opposed to *versus* method, as “a recognition of the importance of personal reflexivity in doing research”, while accepting the openly expressed humanity and medium of the researcher.

Hammersley’s response that “For me, the point of research is to produce knowledge, not to transform the world, or to achieve any other practical result” (1994, p. 293), misses the point. This is because with new knowledge there is intrinsically some transformation of the actors involved as well as the social practice or culture within which the knowledge is constructed. This set of discussion papers reveals the existence of paradigms and paradigms within paradigms. It endorses the need for reflective writing to continue to place the researcher and other actors in their particular space both socially and culturally, declaring their position and thereby contributing to an ongoing aim of validity for ‘objectively subjective’ research. As discussed, such research requires some conscious movement by the researcher between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ roles in order to understand a range of viewpoints and standpoints.

### **Sociocultural influences on subjectivity**

Different viewpoints and standpoints are both individually and socioculturally constructed. Therefore, both auto/ethnography and D.E. Smith's (1987, 1999) feminist sociology are used in this 'social practice' and sociocultural research project. The methodology is viewed as conducive to investigating the social formations, culture and sense-making of, firstly, selected farm women and, secondly, a wider range of farming women and men. Social practice theorists (Holland & Skinner, 1996; Bourdieu, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991) investigate culture, conversation and incidents of practice as sites of knowledge about social and cultural formations and transformations, mental states and discourse (Holland & Skinner, 1996). Holland and Skinner (1996) describe sociocultural research as that focusing "on the cultural practices and discourses that people engage in and embody, and the production of these practices within sociocultural constraints, which are themselves subject to reproduction and change through such human activities" (p. 194).

Through adopting such a paradigm, an attempt is made here to describe personal experiences, seek interpretations and explore struggles and tensions of selected individuals' lived experiences (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Reed-Danahay, 2002). It pursues an understanding of the 'sense of membership' in cultural 'belonging', creation and recreation. Since methodology or the philosophical approach to the research has now been discussed, what follows is an outline of the practical methods of how that philosophical approach will be fulfilled.

### **Capturing data from life stories**

There are many different approaches to seeking narrative accounts of a person's life story i.e. in his/her own words (e.g. Allan & Doherty, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Etherington, 2004; Holland & Lave, 2001a; Plummer, 2001). Through use of personal narratives this study seeks accounts of histories-in-person rather than historical accounts of individuals' lives. That is, it seeks "a constellation of relations between [participants'] intimate self-making and their participation in contentious local practice" (Holland & Lave, 2001b, p. 5). In doing so, though, it also looks at formative life prior to this practice, acknowledging the influence of past on the present. Therefore, through recording and analysing biographical life histories (Salling Olesen, 2006) of a selection of farm women (wives/partners) as case studies,

this qualitative and inductive research seeks to capture their participation and engagement in both on-farm and off-farm practices, including community involvement. It pursues an elucidation of the women's experiences and changing sense of self; their way of making sense of place; their evolving identities. Extended semi-focused interviews assist the subjects' in telling their life histories (ontogenies), including their backgrounds; how they *became* 'farmers' wives'; how they maintained their selves over time and how they transformed their subjective selves. Such interviews identify their intentionalities (Bruner, 1990) and the value of their interaction between dynamic social systems and their individual trajectories. It acknowledges that personal history has complex sets of relationships, timing, space and perceptions of place. The timing in autobiography is not simply linear or chronological but consists of "perceptions of the past and future within the experience of the present and its shifting contexts" (Roberts 2002, p. 84). Consequently, rather than merely telling the story of an individual life, such research seeks to understand the struggles, tensions and conflicts encountered, lived and resolved through transformative encounters and decisions.

While feminist philosophy of valuing women and their narratives as critical and valid data is adhered to here, an interpretive process is pursued through critical analysis, to clarify and legitimise the reality being portrayed. Thus, the investigation is advanced under a constructivist and interpretive paradigm, which accommodates social and experiential contributions in understanding the experiences of the participants. The interview process, with the cases studied, aims to reconstruct (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) their histories as farm women in order to explore the research questions. As the participants tell their stories of their real worlds, the researcher shares their culture and, in particular, their experiences of life as farm women. Analytic and interpretive procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) are employed to arrive at findings with possible implications. The research project data collection comprised ongoing phases of investigation conducted over a four year period.

These investigation phases were concurrent, consisting of auto/ethnographic participant observations within the cultural base which includes my own life and workplace as well as the wider cultural community in which I participate as a farmer, and 'farm wife'. This consisted of ethnographic participant observation (Burns, 2000; Neuman, 1997; Plummer, 2001; Robson, 1993) as well as that of a reflexive practitioner/researcher (Etherington, 2004). Concurrently, semi-structured

ethnographic interviews of the selected cases (of farm women as participants) were undertaken with the emphasis on hearing the women's experiences of life as a farm woman who entered farming through marriage. From these interview and observatory data numerous other women were interviewed in social and working situations in order to widen the research base and to clarify and legitimise emerging data which proved quite confronting. The term auto/ethnographic (with the forward slash) is used throughout this text to denote a symbiosis of my personal involvement and that of wider ethnography (Stanley, 1992). However, autoethnography is utilised when referring directly to the methodology consisting of the researcher's sole personal narrative as promoted by Ellis and Bochner (2000) and others.

### **Auto/ethnographic participant observations within the rural setting in which I live and work**

This first phase was ongoing throughout the period of the inquiry and consisted of keeping a journal and other note-taking of observations of experiences and conversations with other farming persons in my daily life and in particular settings e.g. agricultural field-days, farm discussion groups, business or personal meetings. Reflexive writing was a central element of this phase. Any individual mentioned in these writings was dis-identified, with identifiable aspects changed or generalised for anonymity. Discipline was required to maintain acute powers of observation in order to collect valid, trustworthy and credible data. Sometimes individuals were aware that I was studying a particular area of rural culture and so the observations then became more overt e.g. with my family. These people were given the same respect as others in maintaining their anonymity. For my family, as others, this meant writing in a more generalised manner at times.

As a farming woman, I was included as a full participant within the ethnographic research plan. Ethnography can be seen as a written representation of aspects of a culture. As such, it ties together fieldwork and culture (Van Maanen, 1988). Van Maanen considers that to present the culture without great distortion requires "at minimum some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members" of the group in order to adequately represent and display the culture validly (1988, p. 13). Auto/ethnography was chosen in methodology as a process of reflective gaze, where the researcher is a

full insider and native to the culture by already being a legitimate and full member in the culture studied (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Jones, 2003). Concurrent with this participant observatory practice ethnographic interviews offered a means of entry into the women's worlds.

### **Ethnographic interviews of the selected farm women as participants**

While an ethnographic interview often more accurately resembles a conversation had with a purpose in mind (McCracken, 1988), recognised methods of interviewing are sustained to some degree, in order to maintain some sense of objectivity. This, though, can present as a paradigmatic conflict. Many researchers have written of such challenge and dilemmas of merging public and private selves in writing (Lincoln, 1997), subjectivity and objectivity in interviewing techniques (Oakley, 1981/2003), and in interpreting and translating narrative experiences (Tierney, 1997). This describes a phenomenon in qualitative research in which, when the researcher knows his or her subjects and their workplace or social situation, one needs to be able to move between the roles of 'insider' (i.e. fellow practitioner) to an 'outsider' (e.g. interviewer, data collector). Although this was not a major problem for me as the researcher, a strong focus was required to maintain the role of researcher. While it is arguably almost impossible to switch completely between these two roles, a valid attempt to do so is seen as important for the generation of valid, trustworthy and credible data.

Still further, there is a question of what makes a 'good' or 'proper' interview. Oakley (1981/2003) questions whether a 'proper' interview is ever possible in recognising that inter-subjective relationships require interpersonal encounters that limit objectivity. Unstructured discussion and open-ended conversation are favoured by Carbert (1995), which D.E. Smith (1987) describes as stretching and expressing understanding of relationships within social communities. As such, they anticipate revelation of concepts and perspectives that "are indigenous to the people being interviewed" Carbert (1995, p. 41). This current research seeks such revelations representative of the farm women participants.

While a personal connection and willingness from women interviewees to confide and express personal experience to them openly as 'woman to woman', was experienced by Oakley (1981/2003) and Finch (1984), Carbert (1995) found she was

“rarely able to elicit (such) intimacy” (p. 41) from her farming woman as subjects. She concluded that “patterns of rural sociability (may) be related to rural social geography”. Carbert (1995) observed that some of her ‘farm wives’ revealed social difficulties and she wondered if “loquacious, easy intimacy may not come as easily to farm wives” (p. 41) in comparison to other groups of women. In this present study though, a type of membership, with an acknowledged sense of trust, enabled a privileged rapport between the researcher and the other participants. My privileged position as a full insider with ‘knowing’ and sensitivity, enabled me to penetrate and gain access to the intimate insights of farm women who are used to living and working in relative isolation and isolating thoughts and person, in their own private worlds.

The research, then, reflects the view that ethnographic methods give voice to those identities and subjectivities characterised within the women’s daily experiences while participating as farm women in their specific practices (Whatmore, 1991a; 1993). However, a possible dilemma of representation and interpretation is raised (Whatmore, 1991a), where written representation of participants lives, needs to reflect their actual accounts. As such, a reciprocal and collaborative relationship is essential while recognising that, in the end, the researcher has the final voice in describing and expressing analysis of data and subsequent conclusions (ibid). It requires an integrity and diligence to represent the participants with dignity and respect. This is reflected in the current research in that, while diligently and validly trying to represent the women participants, the final product is one of analysis in conclusion. Carbert (1995, p. 40) reminds us “feminist methodology recommends that research findings should be made available in ordinary language to the people being studied”. That has been a strength of this research as I have spent many hours talking to, and discussing with, groups of rural women, the emerging findings from my research. This research, though, far from being ‘mine’, belongs more accurately to the women participants both those cases studied and those accessed in the wider field-study. The practical and everyday insights and points for reflection have been (and continue to be) disseminated from an industry and women’s perspective; in their language and on their ‘turf’. Participants have been given personal feedback and copies of a range of writings from smaller commentaries to a published book chapter.

## **Conclusion**

From the above, auto/ethnography is seen as denoting interdependence among an interchange of knowledge from within and between the researcher and participants, in collaborative relationship. This collaboration may be a revelation to both parties. Through writing about ourselves or others we reconstruct our own lives through reflection and insight (Morgan, 1998; Roberts, 2002), while reciprocity, validation and feedback enable participants to rewrite aspects of their life through new awareness and perception. So, by “reflecting on experiences both within and outside the research context” (Roberts, 2002, p. 85) connections and inter-relationships are made by, and for, all parties.

In addition, feminist theorists challenge the viewpoint that continual questioning, reading, editing, reflection and further questioning in a microscopic manner is required to find closeness to the truth (Stanley, 1990, 1992). Rather than this, many feminist research methodologies explore issues from the viewpoint of women’s experiences (D.E. Smith, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1993), recognising the value of a person’s history as its influence on the present (Roberts, 2002). Combining these two major methodologies, this study encompasses the construction, maintenance and transformation of ‘self’ of both the participants and the researcher. The multiplicity of voice continually challenges conceptions and seeks new questions in the quest to understand or ‘make sense’. Criticism of auto/ethnography includes a claim that the researcher’s prominence and dominance become “self-indulgent” and that “over reveal” from the researcher places the other subjects as “secondary to the researcher’s own story” (Roberts, 2002, p. 160). In this collaborative approach, though, the researcher’s role is secondary to other participants. It encompasses active partnerships with the other participants in “the exchange of meanings, interpretation and (as) creator of ‘knowledge’” (Roberts, 2002, p. 162) that is constantly being rewritten. Thus, both the researcher’s historical and present experiences with interpretation of his or her ‘self’, assists in interpretation and understanding of others and likewise the interpretations from the participants’ lives transform the researcher and others (including audiences) within (and outside) the cultural context; a case of knowledge exchange.

In these ways, the women participants’ experiences are given legitimacy, and ‘emergent complexities’ and issues are given voice and empowerment. Therefore,

while an active sense of objectivity is retained, the array of more subjective relationships between researcher and other participants, and with potential audiences, is reflective of feminist research and auto/ethnography. While some feminist researchers consider the participants' voice, allowing them to speak for themselves, is paramount, others accept that analysis and interpretation, with emergent or grounded theory emanating, is a legitimate inductive approach to collaborating in new knowledge (Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Within the limitations of length and format of this dissertation, reflexive enquiry is enacted. Through such collaboration this research aspires to legitimise these women's individual realities of 'place', life experience and perspectives on life, within their lived social worlds; pursuing understandings and sense-making of change within both their individual subjectivities and culture.

In sum, this chapter has discussed and proposed approaches to researching the social. It has concentrated on identifying appropriate investigative orientations for a feminist methodology, auto/ethnography and histories-in-person, while discussing the dilemmas of the role of researcher-as-subject. Chapter 5 now focuses more on detail of research design, recognition and sustainability of credibility and the strengths and limitations of the research. It describes and justifies the procedures used to investigate the changing subjectivities of farmers' wives as they negotiate their roles as farm women. Transparency, relevance and validity of methodological orientation and investigative procedures are seen as critical.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### INVESTIGATING FARM WOMEN'S CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHOD AND ANALYSES

*Each ... [exemplary study] in its own way is a story of persistence, of staying the course. That persistence shows up in various ways. Researchers ... report the importance of taking time and expending the energy necessary to get the work done, to follow leads, to stay with the data and the research questions long enough to begin to see patterns, relationships, and flaws (Frost & Stablein, 1992, p. 243).*

#### **Investigating farm women's changing subjectivities**

This chapter describes and justifies the procedures used to investigate the changing subjectivities of farmers' wives as they negotiate their roles as farm women. These investigations centre on auto/ethnographic and feminist approaches within a series of interviews and engagements with nine selected farm women and myself as 'researcher-as-subject'. These were augmented by participant observations and subsequent interactions with many other farm women and those in the wider farming community, over a period of four years. Many of these subsequent interviews were initiated in an attempt to disprove emerging findings, or to further explore issues requiring additional sampling, thereby adding to credibility and trustworthiness. Further engagement with farming women (and men) resulted from national media interest that arose unintentionally from talking about the investigation to a local farming audience. As a result, the research was strongly exposed to industry (and academic) scrutiny. The fact that the highly public dissemination of this research has been met almost entirely with legitimate recognition and has been validated by a broad cross-section of New Zealand farming women (and men), while personally challenging, indicates strong relevance and critical need. To this end, transparency, relevance and validity of methodological orientation and investigative procedures are critical. Chapters 4 and 5 strive to meet these needs.

The methodological orientation of this investigation, along with macro issues, shaping the research design have been advanced in Chapter 4. Perspectives discussed there, included those associated with auto/ethnography, personal histories, interviews

and feminist methodology. Also outlined were, selection of participants, ethical considerations and potential personal dilemmas as ‘researcher-as-subject’. This chapter then elaborates the research design, methods, data generation, analyses and emerging theory-building. It also addresses factors sustaining the validity and reliability of data, and their analyses and interpretation. That is, the strengths and limitations of the research design in the form of the procedures selected and enacted, in securing and analysing the data, are also outlined. In addition, arguments for and against the place of validity and reliability in qualitative research are advanced. In these ways, bases for rigorous data generation and analysis, with strengths in credibility and reliability, are advanced as validating trustworthiness, believability and dependability. These are promoted as underpinning the strengths of the study while reducing limitations. A range of literature on theory of research design, validation, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness, is synthesised to make a case for relevance and rigor, rather than replication.

## **Research design**

While the initial research design focused on an interpretive approach, well into the analysis process it became clear that a critical social science perspective was more appropriate. The next series of sections elaborate the process both procedurally and in analyses. As such, it is an active journey rather than a prescriptive description of process. It moves through a wide range of practice and theory from selection of participants to data collection, incorporating theory emanating from these data along with feedback issues, as well as validation and dissemination.

### **A flexible design interacting with emerging data and theory**

The initial proposal for this inductive investigation focused on global research questions: ‘What is happening in the lives of women on farms? How are they experiencing their lives, work and selves? Are they really merely supporters, or much more valid, farm-business partners?’ In order to pursue these questions from the participants’ viewpoints, it was important for the design to be flexible, to allow for further investigation as issues and theory emerged from early data. It consisted initially of nine case studies of selected farm women, with a series of semi-structured interviews, supported by diaried and historic self-reflections as ‘researcher-as-

subject'. Additional field notes included my ongoing experiences and observations as a farm woman, as well as observations of other participants during times of engagement and deliberation. These participant observatory data added another layer to the research design. As the practical inquiries progressed, the need for engaging other participants to augment the perspectives being included in the inquiry became clear. This meant "moving from one particular sampling source to another according to theoretically relevant criteria that have evolved in the previous source" (Plummer, 2001, p.164). This change in sampling range and type acted as a collaborative front to attempt to disprove the emergent theory, i.e. as a process of further validation. These interactions ranged from 'informal' interviews, in-depth conversations, social engagement and observations.

While these data were initially considered supplementary in that they were viewed as secondary to, and supportive of, the primary case studies (Lofland & Lofland, 1995), they in effect became a strenuous part of the research. They added not only depth and simply numbers of accounts, but through constant-comparatives added to robustness and validity through isolating deviant cases. Deviant (or different and theory-challenging) case analysis is a source for further 'testing', thereby, adding impetus, strength and rigor to the developing analytic argument (Peräkylä, 1997; Silverman, 1997). Thus, these additional narratives helped clarify and augment the validity of the individual cases. It was important to analyse such data, though, according to its situated setting in order to consider major influences (both personal and social) on both my participants' and my own reflections. These secondary engagements then, while becoming more numerous over time, do not dominate or distract from the selected farm women's interview data. Rather, through a process of interweaving them with the different experiences and viewpoints of the farm women studied, they can be used to strengthen the analysis, to support or negate the primary women's experiences and viewpoints. As such, this adds to robustness of the analysis by seeking falsification or refutability of common data (Silverman, 2001). In the interpretive context, this is seen as adding richness and texture to data (Geertz, 2003).

Likewise, the additional farm women's repeated, in-depth and long, interviews were designed to collect data through critical incidents and to identify emerging concepts, while progressively filling any gaps in the data generation. The farm women initially selected as cases were interviewed up to four times over a period of four years, with length of total interview time ranging from three hours to nine hours.

Ethical considerations, including anonymity, confidentiality and reasons for audio-recording the interviews, were discussed with them prior to interviewing. Permission for taping was obtained and signed-off at the end of the interview when the respondents knew of what content they were permitting usage. It was explained that the tapes would be destroyed after transcripts had been generated and they were assured that there were no right or wrong answers but that their open and honest accounts of personal experiences were what was being sought.

In sum, flexibility of design and an open, enquiring attitude that appreciated difference, rather than dismissing it as irrelevance or nuisance value, added to the strength and validity of this research. Likewise, selection of participants in a focused and deliberate manner enabled a broad range of perspectives to be investigated in comparison.

### **Selection of participants**

The women participants were selected for the specific purpose of investigating the lives of a range of unique (yet common) cases (Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994). The sample sought to address a range of profiles including women from different: cohorts, geography, and sectors of the industry (e.g. dairy, sheep & beef), work roles (e.g. on-farm and/or off-farm), and levels of education and career types. It also sought some women from both urban and rural upbringings and those involved in specific interest groups (e.g. Rural Women New Zealand) and other community involvement. It included those women who remain married and farming over time; but also women who had left their farm and marriage. Such purposive sampling was guided by a need to secure contrasts to achieve comparative data leading to identification of emergent categories and specific classes of phenomena. This process sought to develop and study 'a range of types' rather than determining frequency; and explicating 'meaning,' rather than the isolation of 'truth' (Burns, 2000). In this way and through methodical and purposeful selection, a large number of phenomena were able to be investigated and compared from what seems like a small number of initial cases (Silverman, 2001). Purposive sampling though, demands that we think "critically about the parameters of the population we are interested in and choose our sample case carefully on this basis" (ibid, p.250). This was actively exercised during selection of

all participants, including those field participants selected as ‘deviant’ cases or engaged in an attempt to falsify emerging theory.

With these wide-ranging sampling issues at the forefront of my mind, questions shaping the criteria for selection included:

- How influential is a rural or urban upbringing to farm women’s attitudes and experience?
- What differences are there between different agricultural sectors in how women experience their ‘self’?
- What role does off-farm work play in a woman’s subjectivity?
- How might higher education and/or training influence a woman’s ability to see her ‘self’ differently?
- How do women who leave their marriage and farming make that choice and adjust to their new sense of ‘self’?
- How do urban women become rural?
- What role, if any, do age, experience or lifespan issues, play in contextual transformation of self?

While, my personal and business networks and my familiarity with rural communities were used to identify, select, approach and gain access to subjects for study, none of the participants were friends or close acquaintances. Most, though, were known by me to some degree, through work or other contacts. All participants were approached, firstly, by phone and when agreeable to take part in the study, an interview appointment was made. The research project and accompanying ethical responsibilities were discussed prior to interview and informed ethical permission was obtained from the participants. Eight farm women were interviewed on-farm and in their own territory, mostly at their kitchen table. One was interviewed at a quiet café with particular effort made not to ‘stand out’ from other patrons. This meeting was not audiotaped. This venue was chosen as the woman was in a state of insecurity within her farm-marriage. Only one woman ‘refused’ to take part saying while she was interested she was too busy – a hint of fear was felt in her reply. Others, likewise, felt some anxiety, but nevertheless agreed to take part and, subsequently, reported

feeling quite proud to be part of a project that became a high profile media event in New Zealand.

Although rural New Zealand covers a large area, specific networks, connections and relationships exist nation-wide that needed to be considered in ensuring the participants' anonymity. Therefore, in order to protect the anonymity of the nine farm women who became the key focus of the research their profiles are not displayed in any tabulated form but rather woven throughout the thesis. However, they are all women who married onto farms rather than choosing farming as a career. Some, like Helen, Kate, Carol and Louise were raised on farms while Rachel, Anne and Sarah grew up in small rural servicing towns. Pam and I came from larger cities while Bronwyn, an immigrant from a European country, met her husband whilst she was travelling in New Zealand. Rachel, Sarah and Louise are aged in their early to mid 30s while the others are in their mid to later 40s or into their 50s. While these women range in background, age, education, interests and farming, work and life experiences, most entered farming with little or no idea of what would be expected of them. It will be revealed that farm daughters found becoming farm wives as problematic as those from rural towns and city upbringings.

However, in all cases it seemed clear that being a farm woman added to my personal credibility as researcher and gave particular access as an 'insider'. Being able to 'talk the talk' and having genuinely 'walked the walk', gave one trustworthiness and a ready rapport. This contributed to an environment conducive to open exchange, which resulted in seemingly honest responses and rich confidential data. There were times during the interviews when the subjects responded to me as a fellow farm woman; as an 'insider', 'one of us'. Such occasions reflect the phenomenon sometimes observed in ethnographic research, when the researcher 'knows' the culture of his or her subjects and their workplace or social situation and a personal or interpersonal familiarity is generated (e.g. Plummer, 2001). At times, then, I needed to exercise particular sensitivity and awareness while moving delicately between the roles of 'insider' (i.e. fellow practitioner/farmer) to 'outsider' (e.g. interviewer, data collector). At times, the women responded with very personal and emotional disclosures, which they had never expressed to anyone before. This challenged my role, then, as I became a sensitive listener while still maintaining a quiet perceptive focus on the research material. While in these situations it is arguably almost impossible to switch completely between a number of roles, a valid attempt to

do so within ethical boundaries is seen as important for the generation of valid, trustworthy and credible data (Adler & Adler, 1998; Plummer, 2001; Robson, 1993). These emotional responses were received with dignity, respect and privacy. Subsequently, I was to be challenged even more acutely when, later in the research, similar emotional reactions occurred in presenting emerging data in public forums.

### **Case studies with ethnographic interviews and observations**

Undoubtedly, these confiding and very personal disclosures resulted from the trust and intimacy that immersion in an in-depth case study can give both the researcher and participant. It is an immersion that reveals a kind of familiarity, within and among stories, themes and patterns, in people's lives and within narratives of their lives (Neuman, 1997). In the context of this research, then, case study immersion acted as a means of generating both explanatory and exploratory data, through narratives, involving the personal histories of the selected farm women. In a collaborative way, the researcher and participants explored the women's processes of 'becoming' farm women, maintaining their individual 'self' within their specific culture and revealing their experiences of personal transformation. In doing so, I, as 'researcher-as-subject', was faced with the challenge of exploring my own case in parallel.

In order to provide rigor and validity, multiple sources were conducted to provide multiple points of evidence with data converging through comparative analyses (Yin, 1994). This method sought to illuminate decisions or sets of decisions and their intentionality i.e. why the decisions were taken, "how they were implemented and with what result" (Schramm, cited Yin, 1994, p.12). In this way, then, this research sought to illuminate decisions towards (and processes of) formation and re-formation of personal subjectivities, within the women's roles as farm women (i.e. within their farming, personal life and rural culture), and the subsequent results of their decisions. Although literally hundreds of women contributed to the validity of the emerging theory as the research progressed, the study does not claim to represent a statistical sample. Its purpose was to expand and generalise theories (i.e. analytic generalisation), rather than enumerate statistical frequencies (Yin, 1994).

In summary, then, the research design consisted of case studies of women selected from a wide range of farming and personal backgrounds. The process of ethnographic interview was personal and required a high degree of trust that was

accorded from one farm woman to another. In this way generation of data was a collaborative process emerging from within a culture of shared knowledge and experience i.e. one of trust, particularly from the perspective of the participants. It seemed, unknowingly, that the women themselves had burning questions they also wanted to be answered. At times notable insights were 'felt' rather than 'known' by the researcher and surprising responses came from probing as is seen in the next section.

### **Value of focused probing**

While the interviews were guided by a set of prepared questions (Appendix 1), focused probing proved critical. It elicited kinds of responses that included, at times, quite astonishing disclosures from the participants' life histories and revealed new meanings and understandings of their changing subjectivities. These 'reveals' opened areas for further investigation and subsequently debunked many mythological beliefs about farm women and their lives. One such disclosure came from one participant when I had been trying to uncover some conflict that I felt was being avoided. I actually voiced that thought and she responded by saying "oh, is that what you are trying to do? Well, I've spent the last two years crying". This opened a very important area, crucial to her life as a farm woman and to her 'sense of self'. This is an example of the emergent and inductive nature of the ethnographic interview process used in this current research. What ensued was an empowering process for the participant as she felt safe to disclose very personal and private emotions, behaviours and thoughts.

Thus, while interview questions were used as a guide, the emphasis at interview was to obtain a personal account from each individual regarding her experiences and history-in-person. Focused probes and an open and flexible attitude, encouraged through an ethnographic approach, elicited rich data while isolating areas of insight that required further exploration with other participants. These disclosures eventually led to dissemination of major insights into the lives of farm women through the print media, television and radio in New Zealand. It was important to revisit these personal contributions within subsequent interview meetings and especially in the participant feedback sessions which are discussed next.

## **Feedback interviews and member validation**

Feedback sessions were planned primarily as reciprocal conversations, in which participants could receive feedback on the research findings and share insights into their contributions to these new understandings. These meetings were conducted at the initial writing-up stage of the research. The sessions also served to clarify issues, to seek some member validation and to act as a form of reciprocity. As a result, the encounters were more of a discussion or conversation than an interview, although they included some focused questioning. In all cases, the participants were intensely interested in the research findings and media coverage. While, at times, they may have been initially reluctant to accept some specific issues in critical analysis, (which was nevertheless retained), after discussion they often spontaneously, and with fervour, agreed that “it’s just so fascinating” or “I know exactly how *those* women feel”. It seemed that even though they knew that they were one of *those* women, it was easier to think of *that* person objectively while retaining some sense of anonymity. They would have, likely, had to react similarly with other women when the research profile was being discussed publicly and so it seemed almost habitual to retain that position. Some, though, wanted to discuss how they personally had changed their lives as a consequence of their involvement and, invariably, they loved hearing the parts of their life that made major contributions to the thesis argument and reports in the media. Overwhelmingly, the participants reported their participation as being a positive experience and all accepted draft copies of findings, with interest.

Not surprisingly, a major point of feedback was discussing the media reports and its effect on various audiences to whom I had presented findings. They, commonly, felt quietly proud to be part of the process. Thus, the reciprocal sessions gave a degree of ownership of the findings to the farm women, both as participants in the study and as features in the thesis report, while adding to the validation and robustness of the research. This process then validated the research, while adding to the women’s lives reciprocally. In order to explore the narratives and to unravel insights, recordings of interviews and notes from reflections and field-work, were transcribed for ease of analysis and for accuracy, rather than relying on memory. These details are outlined in the next segment contributing to the transparency of method and as a record of the means available for analysis.

### **Transcriptions of interviews, observations and other field work**

It is generally accepted by most qualitative theorists that some transcription of tape recordings is essential for robust analysis and accuracy of data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 2001). If self-transcribing, the researcher becomes familiar with the data and this can aid subsequent reflection and engagement upon the body of transcripts and observational data. For me, this process proved invaluable for becoming acquainted with and processing the data, for identifying emergent concepts and for enabling theory to emerge with some clarity. As discussed, in order to explore the lives and experiences of the farm women and to investigate the changing nature of their subjectivities within their farming culture, extended ethnographic interviews were employed. These interviews successfully enabled access to the unique yet common worlds of the individual farm women. Thick descriptive data (Geertz, 2003) regarding their unique set of circumstances was captured through identifying influences on their changing subjectivities and transformations.

Audio-taping of most interviews enabled me, as researcher, to concentrate on the interview, follow the flow of the discussion and spontaneously generate follow-up questions. Transcriptions allowed for coding and enabled accurate verbatim quotations to illustrate and validate emerging themes and patterns. As stated, one interview was not taped due to being conducted in a public place while another was difficult to transcribe due to background noise. Consequently, data analyses from these two sources relied heavily on field notes and written reflections. As a result, less direct quotes are available from these two women although they are still fully included as participants, by means of paraphrased narrative and generalities, throughout the data and its analysis. Only relevant parts of the feedback interviews were transcribed as the purpose of these interviews (identified through emergent design) was for feedback, reciprocity (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001) and some member validation: as supplementary data and insight (Silverman, 2001). This utilises an approach described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) in which actual transcribing is selective and in which data is revisited during analysis, with more transcription completed as possible theory evolves and areas of relevancy emerge.

Field notes were written from both my everyday life and day to day contacts, along with more extensive participation and observations in the field (including a range of personal, cultural and business situations). They contributed greatly to data

through their diversity and spontaneity. Often small but significant comments were committed to memory rather than overtly noting them in writing, although at times that could be achieved covertly. This followed accepted field practice from theorists like Lofland and Lofland (1995) who identified mental notes, jotted notes and memories as means of recording and recalling notes from the field. It was through such means that unobtrusive notes were made possible as they were often written either walking or driving or otherwise in transit in the field. Unobtrusive observation is likely to have enabled more open discourse than may have not been the case if conversations were blatantly recorded. 'Insider' and full membership roles by the researcher probably made such interactions much more possible and unaffected. In effect, often I was my own gatekeeper having, as of right, free access to culturally sensitive gatherings or meetings.

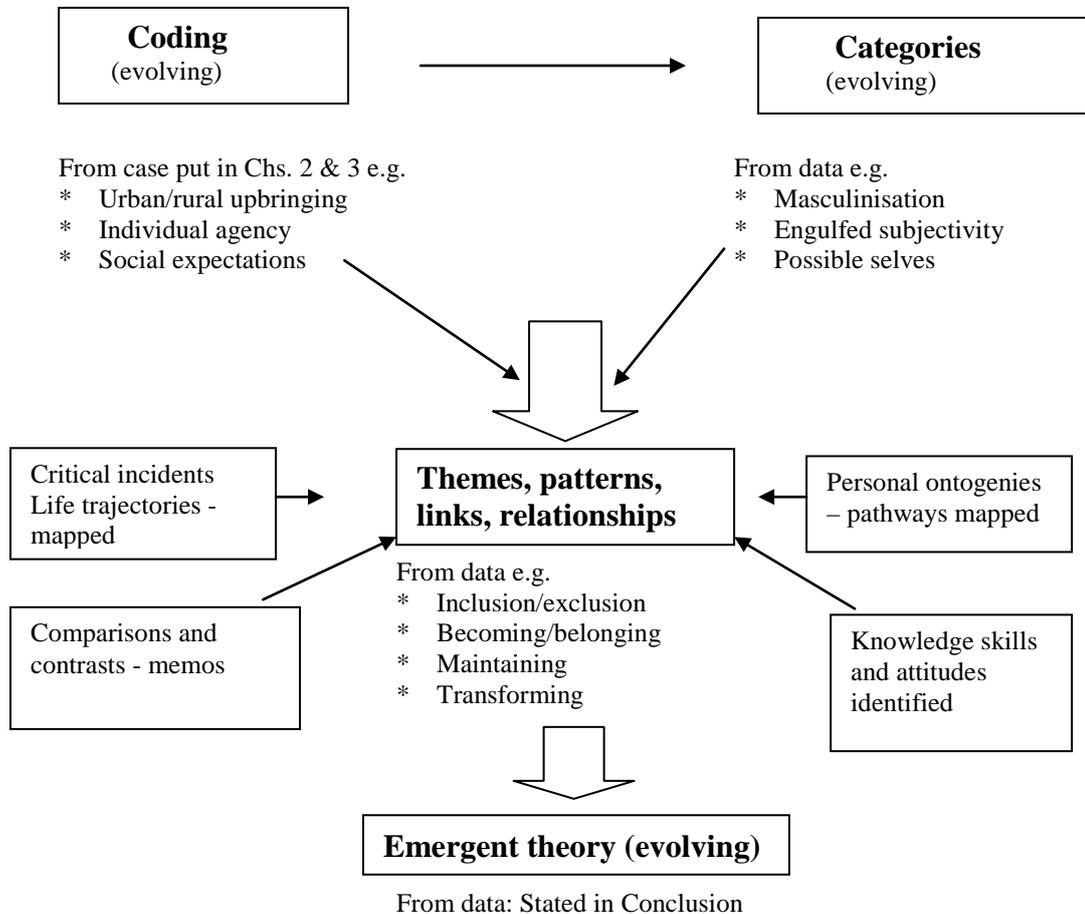
In summary, written records of data from transcriptions of interviews, personal reflections and also field-work were critical to having access to clear, accurate evidence for analysis (as described below). Such written records enabled a process of coding and categorising to be practiced, in order to identify common patterns, themes and relationships to emerge, adding to validity through direct links with data.

### **Documenting process of data analysis and theory building**

As discussed in this chapter, current literature (e.g. Silverman, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) calls for investigators to document their procedure, in reporting, as a means of recognising and sustaining credibility. The following diagram (Figure 1) outlines the process that evolved during the analysis of data from interviews, observations and theoretical sampling, along with comparisons and contrasts (i.e. analytic induction tools). The codes, categories, themes, patterns, links and relationships are not exclusive but are an example of concepts from within the study. The process was non-linear and more chaotic than orderly but this diagram gives some indication of the type of process completed. Figure 1 depicts a planned set of processes that enabled the refining and analysing of data. While the process included a great deal of spontaneity and autonomy, the plan acted as a guard against error and required accounting for negative instances (Seale, 2003). Coding and categorising were used to initiate themes, patterns, links and relationships towards theory. Further

analysis of the themes, patterns, links and relationships enabled an evolving theory to emerge that was able, ultimately, to be proposed as a coherent theory of self.

**Figure 1 A non-exclusive sample of the process of analysis of data, to emergent theory**



### Analysis of data

Data analysis consisted of examining, categorising or otherwise formulating evidence to address the questions under scrutiny (Yin, 1994; Silverman, 1998). Analysis is seen, by some, as being like a ‘literary critic’, as structures of significance are sorted out from the text or transcripts (Geertz, 2003). To assist in this process, self-transcription armed me with a familiarity of data while at the same time adding to the reliability of transcripts (Silverman, 2001). While this was very time consuming, undertaking all the transcription added greatly to my awareness of data in sorting text. Transcriptions were then coded on opposing pages for concepts and general clusters,

patterns, or themes while memos were recorded as considerations and interpretations of cultural and social observations. Questions were subsequently identified for further data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Adopting an inductive approach to coding required a mindset flexible to emergent codes, rather than preset performed codes, (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) which overtime were sorted and re-sorted as new patterns and themes emerged.

In parallel, critical incidents were mapped for patterns, both individually and comparatively, while concept maps, pathways and flowcharts were constructed, at times, in order to find patterns. Sometimes connections that emerged were unexpected and often there was more fluidity than concretion in emerging themes. This resulted in many inconclusive trails. A wealth of data analyses were accumulated in the form of post-it notes, charts, diagrams, tables and pages of memos and comparisons. These were regularly revisited, resorted and re-worked, requiring constant organisation and reorganisation. Memos and diagrams were used to aid theory-building through recording the analytic process and clarifying emerging concepts, links and relationships. Transcript pages were numbered with relevant quotes highlighted, colour coded and page numbers noted for retrievability, as verbatim data. As well as being integral to the process of theory development, the inclusion of this verbatim data in the final written report contributes to the credibility and relevance of the findings.

### **Emergent theory grounded in data**

Although the procedure described in the previous section does not purport to be as prescriptive a form of grounded theory that some may prescribe to, it does incorporate the philosophy for grounded theory described by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.12) as:

... theory that was derived from data systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another. A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind... [but] begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data.

They see the research design emerging during the research process, as concepts and relationships emerge from data, through qualitative analysis. In this current study, analytic tools (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were employed to facilitate inductive theory and to ground theory in the research data. These analytic tools included: asking

questions that built an evolving theory; analysis of transcripts and field-notes; analysis of critical incidents through comparisons and contrasts; making theoretical comparisons; including theoretical sampling by revisiting transcripts for further analysis; and use of supplementary interviews of, or conversations with, participants for disputing or reputing new concepts and emerging theory.

Previous research into farm women and their life experiences on farms, discussed in Chapter 2, was not revisited until data was analysed, interpreted and discussed in report. This ensured that the findings and theory could emerge from the data and not from other research. Theoretical comparisons driven by the emergent findings and emergent theory were synthesised into the report, adding to the robustness of both the process and the product. While some aspects of the phenomena studied confirm previous research, other features differ with the result being an original view of participating farm women and their transforming subjectivities, inductively constructed. Importantly, data from the in-depth interviews of cases was strongly supported ethnographically by a multitude of farm women in the field. Through this method interview data was revisited by introducing new ethnographic participants as gaps in knowledge and understanding required, until a point closely resembling theoretical saturation was reached. This is a point in category development where collecting additional data seems counter-productive, with 'new' data seeming to not add significantly to that 'discovered' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). So, while analysing data to a point of saturation strengthened emerging theory, credibility and associated trustworthiness were grounded, initially, by research design that incorporated multiple sources of evidence as discussed next and depicted in Figure 2.

### **Strengths and limits of the research design:**

#### **A discussion on validity and reliability**

Strengths and limitations of the research design are discussed as a function of validity and reliability. While it is commonly agreed that reliability is a difficult concept to portray in qualitative research, in this project it is safe-guarded by a range of procedures including use of multiple sources of evidence, comparative conclusions and open documentation of evidence and procedures. While on the face of it, this study may be seen as having a small sample, as the investigation progressed, access

was gained to wide-ranging sections of New Zealand farming culture as is discussed in the following sections.

### **Multiple sources of evidence converging in conclusion: (Figure 2)**

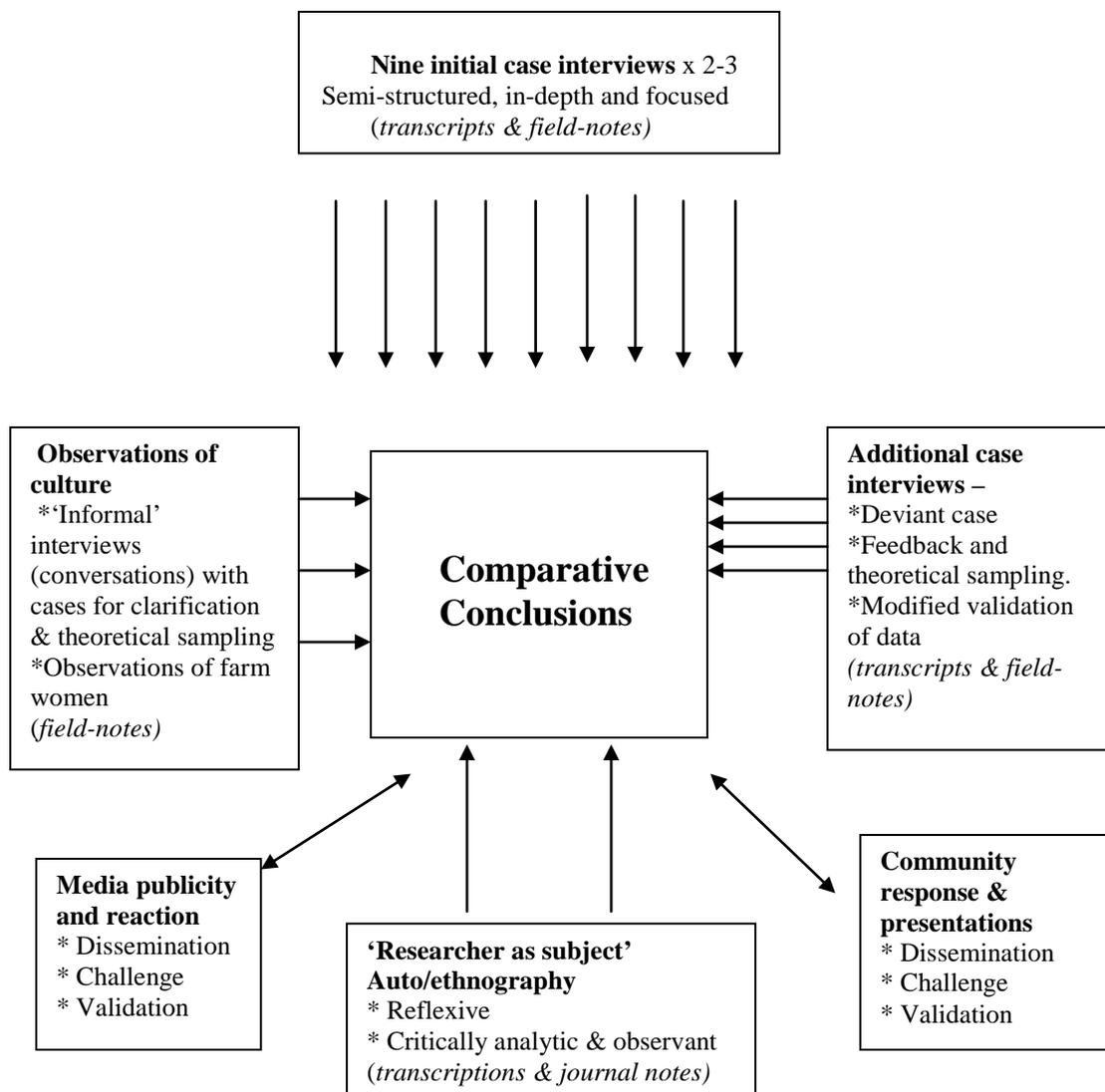
Multiple sources of evidence in qualitative research are considered by some (Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994) to act like multiple experiments allowing for a process leading to analytic generalisations. When participants are selected with a specific purpose in mind or in a quest to disprove developing theory, the comparative results are likely to be strengthened through constant analyses. These extensive and intensive sources then, contribute to the validity and to a degree of reliability even though, realistically, cultural studies and research involving case studies are not fully replicable.

However, a range of control and monitoring devices were utilised here to guide and challenge my insight, awareness, doubts and questions, as researcher. As illustrated (Figure 2) different sources of data contributed to comparative conclusions while underpinned by a concerted effort to prove emerging evidence wrong, rather than take it as ‘the truth’ or as one reality. Cross-checking observations and interpretations for both internal and external consistency was a priority (Neuman, 1997). When emerging data was consistently confirmed it gained traction but was still further challenged by public and industry-based responses. Through these ongoing constant-comparative methods, then, data from the serial case interviews were analysed (Figure 2). These data were then further supported or negated by accounts from numerous detailed conversations with both farm women and farming men.

These additional cases along with those more generally observed through participation in the social and cultural worlds of farming, acted as possible deviant cases and for theoretical clarification. Seeking out other possibilities helped to increase confidence in the credibility and rigour of the results, by constantly questioning emerging theory. Although, as a qualitative research project, numbers are not of the essence, this process ultimately covered many hundred farm women and also many farming men. The unexpected media publicity and wide ranging dissemination of the emerging findings added to the numbers of people both validating and/or challenging the research findings. This became a two-way process, thereby further adding to validity through constant comparatives. Intrinsic in all these

processes was myself as ‘researcher as subject’, constantly reflexive, critically analytic and actively observant.

**Figure 2 Convergence of multiple sources of evidence to comparative conclusions**



Adapted from Yin (1994, p. 93)

The process of analysis of transcripts and journaled notes acted as a constant check on validity. It added to awareness of process while challenging and testing emerging theory enabling strong, believable results, grounded in data. Thus, it was by convergence of these multiple sources of evidence that well-worked, comparative

conclusions emerged as credible new understandings, adding to new knowledge and advanced theory.

### **Incorporating media attention, dissemination and the aftermath**

As mentioned previously, the research and its early findings were reported widely and discussed on New Zealand television, radio and in the print media. Such was the extent of the coverage that the focus and purpose of the research became quite public. The media attention, described in Chapter 1, by breaking when it did (near the end of the data collection period), disallowed adding any more additional cases for theoretical clarification or deviance. Due to the extensive publicity, most people within farming circles became well aware of the research and its focus, and had opinions (many of which were likely to have been influenced by the journalistic accounts) about it and its application to their lives. While I may have included one or two more theoretical cases, these were halted once the research became more widely discussed to avoid the possibility of contaminating data. The publicity though, opened another whole aspect to the research. It gave me access to farm women (and men) throughout New Zealand. As a result, I became a privileged confidant to many, many women and had the opportunity to speak to, and with, literally hundreds of farm women, about these issues. Farm women sought me out in varied ways and situations and this made an unanticipated and unplanned contribution to my research. While not explicitly merged with the original research data, the later data fulfil a validation role and, at times, of alerting me about areas for further analyses. This 'effect', although personally challenging, adds greatly to the validity of the research.

Women commonly thank me for exposing 'burdensome myths' while a few, although uneasy about personal disclosures (at least initially), then concur by telling me their stories of emptiness; their sense of void in searching for their authentic 'self' i.e. who they are and who they could be or could have been. Most tell stories confirming the research data, the unloading of which seemed a relief to them. At the same time, they have come to realise that their conflicts and tensions are common rather than being 'just (them)'. One revealing point is that I was able to speak to a significant number of farm women who had been suicidal on their individual farms and yet on questioning it was revealed that after leaving their farm-marriage, they, without exception, have had no further mental health problems. Many women still

living on farms as ‘farm wives’ also spoke of similar issues, which while commonly seen as ‘her’ health problems are likely to be more cultural and socially rooted. It seems that while an ‘unknown’ has now become ‘known’, there are many complex issues still to be explored. So, media attention, while not sought, added an unexpected texture to this ethnographic study by broadening the accessible base of farm women and adding scrutiny. This spontaneous media publicity exposed critical aspects of this social science study that may not have been easily disseminated otherwise.

In sum, this section has outlined a research design that focuses on producing a credible research through use of constant-comparatives and commitment to strenuously challenging emerging theory before making claims. Issues of validity and credibility in qualitative research though, are still widely debated in regard to strengths and limitations of research designs, and so these are considered in the next section.

### **Recognising and sustaining credibility**

Much of the debate, regarding the actual value of qualitative research in social inquiry, centres on the reliability and validity of qualitative studies. Many theorists agree that fully descriptive documentation of procedures, along with records of data (including verbatim accounts), are vital to demonstrate concrete evidence of method and analysis (e.g. Neuman, 1997; Silverman, 2001; Yin, 1994). Others, though, see a conflict regarding paraphrasing accounts or reconstructing incidents where a researcher’s personal perspectives may influence the reporting (Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2001). However, more common views, favour trustworthiness as the critical component of validity in qualitative research i.e. research that is believable, honest, unbiased and thorough (Robson, 1993). Value is then added to the research findings through credibility i.e. by producing a believable persuasive product culminating in a logically-argued, written account that answers the questions of the reader. Validity and generalisability are seen as key issues for credible enquiry, with relationships drawn from within robustly analysed and strongly argued findings, thereby adding to trustworthiness. Attempts at falsifying claims, or disproving findings, before making direct links between different concepts or actions, is seen as a key factor in presenting valid research. Lather (2003) promotes strong attempts at falsification as she cites Cronbach (1980): “The job of validation is not to support an

interpretation, but to find out what might be wrong with it. A proposition deserves some degree of trust only when it has survived serious attempts to falsify it” (p. 190).

As described earlier in this chapter, a strength of this research is a concerted and conscious commitment to challenge claims through constant comparatives until proven otherwise. These serious attempts at falsifying claims are seen as a critical component of this research project. While at times issues were further clarified, requiring further investigation, almost invariably major findings were confirmed.

While subjectivity is an intrinsic part of the design of this present study, a consistent effort was made to ensure trustworthy, valid data and analysis, while seeking to expose and limit bias. A range of ways, to ensure trustworthy research, have been used throughout this project as identified from a range of theorists (e.g. Lather 2003; Neuman, 1997; Seale 2003; Silverman 2001; Yin 1994). Many of these practices have been discussed above and have been used with diligence in this current research. They include: member validation, reciprocity, reflexive and objective subjectivity (Lather, 2003) and self auditing (Seale, 2003). These have been combined with multiple methods and sources of evidence (Yin, 1994), attempts to falsify claims (Lather, 2003; Silverman, 2001), and deviant-case analysis (Silverman, 2001). All were supported by using participants’ own words and grounding theory in data. A strong commitment to these ways of establishing data trustworthiness are seen as underpinning strengths of this qualitative research, thereby building a credible and trustworthy contribution to cultural, industry and academic knowledge.

By keeping organised records and by writing descriptive and full accounts of the methods used, coupled with data trustworthiness as described above, a relevant and rigorous research project was sought. Geertz (2003) using Ryle’s term of ‘thick description’ promotes building layer upon layer in presenting an ethnographic study. In the current research this involves building interview upon interview imposed on yet again by observations, a wide range of conversations and other discourse and with the involvement of ‘researcher as subject’. All these processes have been, further, critically overseen by media and public scrutiny.

In summary, from the above declarations, full intentions and knowledge of good practice are presented in affirmation of recognising and sustaining credibility. There are, however, some aspects that limit the research findings as are now discussed.

### **Limiting factors to the research design**

Limitation to size of this thesis report means that only selected examples of data and theoretical concepts are included although a range of situations and experiences are presented. In the process of writing up this research an intention to present more narrative data from the participants had to be modified significantly due to requirements regarding length of thesis. For verbatim support of concepts and phenomena, though, generally at least two examples are presented in report, in order to strengthen the case of analysis. This intensive and inductive process adds to the credibility of emergent findings and theory within limitations of length. Chapter 8 in presenting transformative stories from the women's perspectives deliberately applies a more narrative style as a contribution to transparency and fidelity in honouring the methodologies and theories of approach argued in this and the previous chapter (i.e. Chapters 4 and 5) as critical for ethnographic and feminist research. It strives to illustrate clearly what is being claimed, while telling understandable, absorbing stories (Campbell, 2005; Etherington, 2004) of the women's ways of being. However, it is acknowledged that there is a delicate interplay within interpretive people-centred accounts between accessing and understanding the full nature of socially and culturally situated experiences, on the one hand, and the researcher's need to get behind and beneath the women's own awareness of the dynamics constituting their experiences and their subjectivities, on the other.

Although generalisability is limited in a qualitative study unless it is combined with some quantitative measures of populations (Silverman, 2001), purposive sampling combined with theoretical sampling (i.e. sampling on the basis of emerging concepts, (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)), and the comparative approach, assists in a tentative or reserved analytic and theoretical generalisability. In general agreement, Silverman cites Peräkylä who put the case that, "The comparative approach directly tackles the question of generalisability by demonstrating the similarities and differences across a number of settings" allowing researchers to make larger claims about their analysis (Silverman, 2001, p.250). This view of valid analytic generalisation is further supported by Yin (1994, p.3) in his claim that "if two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed". In considering such views, this present comparative research makes tentative analytic and theoretical generalisations while making no other claims about generalisability.

However, farm women's responses to this research as a result of publicity clearly indicate that the findings are not limited to these participants alone but may rather have a more general application.

### **Possibilities of bias**

With qualitative research, in particular, it is essential to be aware of possibilities of personal bias. While subjectivity is an intrinsic and important aspect of this research, it is important to recognise when "our own or the respondents' biases, assumptions, or beliefs are intruding into the analysis" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.97). It is critical to be able to step 'outside' and examine data with objectivity although it is not possible to completely free data of bias (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Being aware of possible bias has created a consciousness for me as researcher-subject to be alert to and limit such influences while recognising that this is difficult to achieve, especially within an interpretive paradigm. In my written work, I have been aware of indicating any possible instances of potential bias. Interestingly though, as a farm woman who has managed a farm-marriage well, continuing to farm while seeking other opportunities for myself, I still feel an affinity with those women who have left their marriage and also those who have struggled to access a space and place for their own needs. This empathy and understanding seems to come from understanding their situations but more importantly from 'knowing' their plight as another cultural member who has lived in this very specific context with its entanglements, pressures and social and cultural expectations. It seems critical to acknowledge and value a range of transitions throughout life trajectories, with a series of 'places' over time, given due recognition and analysis, rather than merely viewing or being functionally aware of one's current place.

### **Ethical considerations and avoiding potential dilemmas**

Knowledge and practice of research ethics underpin the integrity of both the research and the researcher. They require a personal moral code as a defence against unethical behaviour (Neuman, 1997) as well as complying with academic and institutional requirements. But, as a PhD student and enthusiastic industry-based researcher, the

motivating force for me, in ensuring ethical conduct, is a sense of responsibility and knowledge that I will continue to face public and industry scrutiny and regard. Attention to both these factors can be burdensome but may be lessened by knowledge of well-applied personal and institutional ethics. Most questionable practices in social research circulate around issues of lack of consent, coercion, deception or violating personal rights (Robson, 1993). But while informed consent is more clear-cut in the case of interviewing, it is less defined in the instances of observations.

In seeking informed consent from the cases for interview an institutional protocol requiring formal approval and permit was followed. It is based on avoiding such violations. Particular considerations in this study included a critical need for participants to contribute data secure from fear or favour and in an atmosphere of confidentiality. In this instance, an assurance of security of raw identifiable data was given with assurance that no person apart from me had any possible access to data other than dis-identified findings from the research. Participants indicated a confidence in this commitment to confidentiality, anonymity and dis-identification. They were fully informed and made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage during the process. I was constantly aware of the need of dis-identification in order to control risks of recognition of participants and others (e.g. family, friends and neighbours) within their stories. To this end, all interviews were conducted in as private a setting as possible with no data left at the interview setting. As an added precaution audio-tapes were not handled by anyone apart from me, as I typed transcripts myself and immediately dis-identified any written data. Any published data has been vetted to ensure anonymity with any data identified as sensitive to the participant rendered anonymous to both researcher and participant satisfaction. Any further published reports are to be subject to an appraisal by the authors for any areas of sensitivity and these will then be subject to further dis-identification. The dis-identified data and any records of participants are secured with no written identification available. In these ways, while mindful of potential risks, through awareness, these risks are constantly minimised and managed. At times, it has been necessary to fictionalise data to protect the non-identification of participants or others like family members, friends, neighbours and other community members. This is an ongoing priority.

As the study progressed, participants were increasingly sourced from all geographical areas of New Zealand, which in itself adds to protection of anonymity.

While the initial case studies comprised nine farm women, through the whole data collection process literally hundreds of women participated through a range of interactions by phone, e-mail and letters. In all cases, pseudonyms were used for all persons and identifying details changed. These processes ensured that the personal details and personal information of the participants were protected while empowering them through new self-knowledge. But vigilance has to be ongoing. Yet, even with cautious attentiveness and conscious ethical considerations dilemmas can occur particularly when people's intimate lives are being searched and researched as was demonstrated within this present study. This aspect of the research is considered in the next section.

### **Ethical Issues and dilemmas faced**

In recent times, particularly since the late 1980s more reflexive and more personally-grounded research styles have been promoted (e.g. Denzin, 1997; Plummer, 2001; Reinhartz, 1992; D. E. Smith, 1999; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Plummer (2001) refers to this as a 'value debate' which requires researchers to consider personal issues and responsibilities involved in social research and the potential or real dilemmas that may emerge. It assumes a particular sense of responsibility simply by entering a person's private world and requires acute reflexive practice. For me, such a sense of responsibility and due care was tested early on by the women's emotional reactions to telling their stories, when, repeatedly, revelations of painful issues reduced them to tearful responses.

On reflection, it seems obvious that engaging the women participants in reflecting upon their personal life histories and their sense of selves might stand to raise issues and emotions of personal kinds. However, it was disquietening to me when, as stated previously, four of the first five women interviewed were tearful in describing their lives as farm women. Although this possibility had been pointed out to me by an external examiner at my confirmation seminar, it was still surprising to me and quite unexpected. These women commonly presented with a confident demeanour and then were overcome while telling of their hardships and, at times, expressing sheer misery and despair. This challenged me as researcher while I drew on my experience within the social services field to cope with their emotions and needs. It was, though, a personal challenge for me to consider my responsibility

towards these women and my role in breaking through their apparently confident demeanour; a veneer that had been hard-fought and well-protected. The women's ready responses to me and their sheer gratefulness for being able to expose these issues confidentially, was both a privilege and a burden. The intensity propelled me to question my ethical responsibilities. While accepting that such disclosure is a risk intrinsic to researching personal lives, I am well aware of the responsibilities that go with that privilege. Lofland and Lofland (1995, p.64) describe such issues well, in stating that ethical dilemmas are no more readily resolved in research than in everyday life. In doing so they quote Urie Bronfenbrenner (1952, p.453) saying that, "The only safe way to avoid violating principles of professional [the Loflands add, *and personal*] ethics is to refrain from doing social research altogether." This research has proved to be important to farm women in New Zealand and I am assured, by their responses, that this sensitive, but bold, exposure of well-buried issues has already helped many women in difficult situations. In some ways, this justifies the need to have these women exposing and facing their personal griefs. It has helped to explode a myth of happy fulfilled farm women living a privileged and idyllic life on New Zealand farms.

In considering these issues and dilemmas, it both confirms and challenges ethnographic research of this type where personal struggles and tensions are faced 'in the telling'; in generating data. The challenge is in the constant questioning by the researcher of her intrusion into people's lives. It then places another responsibility on her, as researcher, to use that data for the good of both the women and of others. Follow-up contact and feedback are given an added role, one of empowerment through sharing the value of the results. These women, as participants, are buoyed by knowing the reaction of many individuals and many audiences, to the exposure and dissemination of the issues raised by this research. They are empowered to know that they are not the only one (as they previously thought) who has struggled through issues as a farm-wife and in a farm-marriage. While these issues have been very energy-sapping and exhausting of time and personal investment, the value is in the relevance and importance of the quite surprising and unexpected results. It has, though, placed an extra burden on me as a remote PhD student and it raises the question of whether in such circumstances there should be a type of personal supervision (apart from the academic role) similar to that accorded many social service personnel. This is not something I have heard spoken about although it is

common in counselling services (from one professional to another). I have more recently set up some peer-support by telephone to absorb some of this tension.

While this section has raised more dramatic issues, it is clear that there is an enormous need for relevant support and controls in social research particularly when it is of a personal nature. Accordingly, this research confirms the need and relevance for regular everyday practical ethical protocols supporting ethical boundaries and behaviours to protect and assist needs that arise for both participants and researchers.

## **Conclusion**

Building on methodological philosophy as discussed in Chapter 4, this chapter has advanced a case for rigor in research design, methods, data generation, analysis and grounded theory. Different viewpoints on what constitutes a valid and reliable qualitative study were discussed while a case was advanced for sustainable credibility through a process including a wide range of practices that assist rigorous data generation and analysis. Points for recognition of a rigorous and credible research process were identified through literature. Likewise, methods of case study, personal histories, interviewing and observation were described in some detail as a means of documenting evidence of process. Since replication is considered unlikely due to the methodology and methods employed, this could be considered a limitation of the study, as could the size of the formal interview sample. However, a case was made for strengths in credibility and reliability of this research validating its trustworthiness, believability and dependability.

This chapter has reviewed and discussed research design, methods, data generation, data analysis and grounded theory, in relation to an inductive and constructivist approach to research methodology. Recognition and sustainability of credible research were discussed in relation to the strengths and limits of the current research. It has established a “kind of vicarious apprenticeship” demonstrating a reflective learning process and awareness of methodological implications (Seale, 2003, p. 181). It acknowledges possibilities of improvements in practice, while protecting (supervised) spontaneity and autonomy. Through absorbing aspects of a range of methodological positions, I believe I have developed my own style “built on principled decisions, rather than ... uninformed beliefs” (ibid., p. 182).

The following three chapters (Chapter 6, Chapter 7 & Chapter 8) demonstrate these methods and processes in practice, while presenting and discussing analyses of data in relation to theory. Chapter 6, the first part of the results and analysis, explores the personal histories of the participants and analyses how these ontogenies relate to the individual participant's initial transformation of 'self' in process of becoming a 'farm wife'. Cross-case analyses are synthesised with the participants' personal stories.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **‘BECOMING’ AND ‘BELONGING’ AS CONTESTATION, SUBJUGATION AND RESISTANCE WITHIN POWER AND GENDER RELATIONS**

*“I feel that I’m here really to support - to support Andy, and I’m more than happy to do that and look after him and the children – that’s fine. But if I lived in town I wouldn’t be expected ... to go out and lift a thousand sheep and cut off their tails if you didn’t like to do it. ... But in saying that – if I’m at home, like today, Andy will come in at lunchtime and say, ‘ohh, what’s for lunch?’ and so he expects me, if I’m at home, that perhaps I should do him lunch ...” ... As she said wistfully, “It is a really nice lifestyle you’ve just got to be really happy doing it.” (Rachel)*

The previous two chapters advanced an orientation to investigating farm women’s sense of self and justified the procedures used to investigate the changing subjectivities of farmers’ wives as they negotiate their roles as farm women. Here, Chapter Six reports and discusses findings of the processes and challenges of change within the personal journeys of a selected group of women who by marrying farmers sought to become farm wives and thereby to belong to farm-life, its culture and a farming community. At the same time these women sought to retain a sense of belonging to their selves, which required a range of reconciliations, contestations and negotiations. Many of these women commenced these journeys from non-farming positions and backgrounds while others grew up on farms and in farming communities. Yet, despite these different starting points they all encountered challenges and negotiations in ‘becoming’.

#### **Becoming and belonging: farm wives’ journeys**

These major life-changes are presented here through an ethnographic study with personal narratives used to set the stage for understandings of how participating farm women ‘became’ farm wives and how or whether they managed a ‘sense of belonging’. Narratives are sourced from transcripts of a series of semi-structured interviews, supported by in-depth conversations and interactions with these and other farm women. Observations collected through participation within the field over a period of more than four years, add further texture. Additionally, my own experiences

as a 'farm wife' of more than thirty five years are woven into the text thereby adding an auto/ethnographic layer to this narrative. While names are used to define individual cases when anonymity issues are not seen as threatened, names are not used for women in the wider field as they are too numerous to nominate and more likely would cause confusion. The data chapters (6 to 8) strive to illustrate clearly what is being claimed, while telling understandable authentic stories of the women's ways of being (Campbell, 2005; Etherington, 2004). A less formal register of language is chosen in the data chapters, as seen appropriate, with undefined use of cultural and colloquial terms to engage the reader in expressions of custom and lifestyle while avoiding disruption of flow. Chapter 8 particularly grants the women continuity of voice to express their personal transformations in ways checked in this chapter and Chapter 7 due to word limitations. By this inclusion, Chapter 8 adds to transparency and fidelity in honouring the methodologies and theories of approach argued for in Chapters 4 and 5 – that is, those critical to ethnographic and feminist research. In brief, Chapter 6 considers issues of the self in becoming and belonging to a particular cultural position; Chapter 7 discusses the tensions and conflicts relating to contests of maintenance of self and maintenance of culture while Chapter 8 celebrates the women's often traumatic but transformative journeys in seeking resolutions inclusive of an authentic sense of self.

While this chapter relies more heavily on shorter quotes and paraphrasing, longer quotes and individual stories are told more extensively at times, for both clarity and effect. A strong attempt is made to avoid the disintegration of authentic data and to empower the women through legitimation of their experiences (D.E. Smith, 1987, 1999). The women's stories in the early sections of this chapter (ethnographies of 'becoming' and 'belonging') are blended and presented within themes arising from the initial analysis of interview data. These narratives relate sociocultural histories and early inter-cultural experiences along with issues associated with ways of adapting to a new culture or a new cultural position. The women's ethnographies are followed in the second half of the chapter by a discussion on issues entitled *Becoming and belonging within complex power and gender relations*. In this section, issues relating to women's work, patriarchal power and social inclusiveness and exclusiveness, are elaborated and conclusions are drawn. Theoretical analyses of the major themes are presented through narratives in ways that aim to retain fluidity and authenticity of the women's accounts. In using this approach, the chapter strives to identify and elaborate

how farm women, who have entered farming through marrying a farmer, may aspire to 'become' and 'belong' to their adopted culture. As will be evidenced, both these concepts are problematic.

### **Issues of 'becoming' within entanglements**

It seems that 'becoming' is strongly socially-constructed within cultural and historical expectations and pressures. Self-expectations (Hall & Duval, 2003) constructed through earlier experiences and agentic action, become less clear for these women as the self and social merge within a new and specific cultural framework. Together, for these women, they form a complex and often potentially contradictory entanglement. Maintaining a balance between self and culture requires a re-invention of one's self, in a socially acceptable order that is likely to reward the newcomer with some social inclusiveness. This offers an increasing sense of 'belonging' for the incoming woman. However, when this sense of 'belonging' fails in authenticity, or persists as incongruence over time, agentic action may be enforced as the woman seeks to restore a sense of equilibrium for her 'self'. The data confirms that traditionally farm women have worked hard at accommodating their new roles (and often new culture) and have been willing to reconcile their self with other demands. However, there is now growing evidence of generational differences (O'Hara, 1998). Part of this difference is a resistance to trading the 'self'. Traditionally, such a trade-off has been party to an intense interplay between gender and power relations (see: Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987, 2002, 2005). This interplay has persisted over time and is now being played out under changing personal and community conditions. In the past, it was shaped by incoming farm women's either free or hesitant participation in the farm communities' culture. Yet, now it seems that resistance to this consummate-participation (in what is largely a supportive role in the men's chosen career) is gaining traction, as women acknowledge a need for choice for their 'self'. Resistance is evident in the actions of a generation of women who have traded their selves in the past, and by a generation of younger women who are refusing or resisting engagement in that interplay by confronting social and cultural expectations.

The women whose voices are (re)presented in this study came from varied backgrounds with some from cities, some from rural towns that service the farming communities and some off farms. All had major adjustments to make after marrying

their particular farmer. Those raised as farm daughters learnt that while they have many of the practical skills required on a farm, the position of farm wife is very different to that of farm daughter. Many make the point also that entering a family farm has complexities of relationships and cultural expectations that they have not experienced in their own family, known from birth. While making sense of farming culture is intrinsic to, and a manifestation of, one's 'becoming', the underlying complexities and tension-laden processes that lie behind these life changes are not so obvious. Only a fragment of the data can be represented in this and following data chapters (Chapters 6-8) but illustrative and interwoven examples and narratives are used to represent farm women's experiences of 'becoming'. Stories are interpreted for intentions and interplays between the personal and social imperatives as these imperatives anchor or seed cultural (re)productions, through circumstances and choice, or through cultural impositions. Through social analysis of gender and power relations, understandings are sought about what lies behind these relationships and how they link to structure of authority and cultural histories. An attempt is also made to acquire some "grasp of the tensions and contradictions in these processes and the ways they change between the generations" (Connell, 1987, p.6). As elaborated through these next three chapters, although lives of farm wives are unique to their particular situations, common issues interact and by doing so "define a sphere of social life that is strongly patterned" (ibid, p.6). Hence, by defining such patterns, while not claiming generalisation, it is suggested that these relations, their reproduction and transformation are unlikely to be restricted to the subjects in this study alone.

### **Ethnographies of 'becoming' and 'belonging'**

Farm women (wives) enter into the farm-marriage initially through an emotional bond and decision i.e. they get married. In doing so, they not only marry a farmer but also a farm and often an extended farming family. 'Becoming' a farm(er's) wife entails learning what to do, how to do it and how to be. While seeming to willingly 'be'-come, in reality these women are often 'over'-come by pressures of the farming culture and their desire to please and to be useful. As one woman put it, "... it's total immersion ... and then you wonder why you did it for twenty years." With some willingness but at times in spite of their 'self', these women describe overwhelming

engulfment in the farm and in their husband's career and life. Often it seems there is a trade-off between 'becoming' and seeking other possibilities for 'self'. As several women expressed, "The farm always comes first." "What is left is for your self but there usually isn't anything left," another woman concluded.

It seems, though, that a sense of belonging may rely on to what degree one is prepared to "buy into" the expected norms and behaviours (Wertsch, 1998, p.55). This willingness, it seems, is influenced by an individual's sociocultural history taken into marriage along with their perception of choice and their subsequent experiences as farm wives and farm business-partners. As is depicted, choice is relative and may range from that of fully embracing the culture, competencies and skills, to strongly resisting. But, it seems clear that in order to 'become' and to 'belong' one needs some sense of knowing, of power, of integration and of valued recognition. Successive sections of this ethnographic chapter look at early influences both before and within the marriage partnership including their sociocultural histories of becoming and attempts to belong.

### **'Becoming' part of a new or known culture**

A person's past history is intrinsic to who they are and to how they adjust to new experiences (Holland, 1997; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998; Holland, & Lave, 2001a; Skinner, Pach & Holland, 1998; Holland & Skinner, 1996). So although these cases come from very different backgrounds and live and work in specific contexts, within their unique stories there are many parallels. In this study, four of the nine main cases are daughters of farmers while three more were raised in small rural-servicing towns. One was from a larger city and yet another from a major city in Europe. Women, who were engaged with in the wider fieldwork of this project, come mainly from farming backgrounds or from small rural-servicing towns. It became apparent during this study that few farm women come from large New Zealand cities, although some are immigrants commonly from the USA, UK, Canada or Europe. This may be an indication of some resistance by (N.Z.) city women to entering such a commitment. The myth of farm life may hold little attraction for these women who see other possibilities.

Yet, for many, 'becoming' a farm woman entails learning a whole new set of skills. This chapter, though, is not merely about coming to 'know' the fine art of

making preserves and cooking for ‘the men’ or learning how to milk cows or lamb ewes. It is about intentions, influences, choices or impositions that occur as a result of marrying a farmer. Concurrently, the tensions and conflicts that arise from the process of ‘becoming’ and constructing a ‘sense of belonging’, and the extent to which individuals’ identities are reformed through these life-changes, are revealed.

While there is a perceived ease of transition and intentional effort for farm daughters in becoming farm wives (as opposed to their urban-raised counterparts), this ‘knowing’ does not exempt them from tensions and conflict. Some awareness of these tensions is indicated by many ex-farm daughters spoken to, who are choosing to avoid potential conflict by making alternative life choices. As one put it, “I decided very early on that I wouldn’t marry a farmer because I didn’t want to be tied to the land.” Others have expressed the view that they have seen what their mothers went through as New Zealand farm wives, especially in the mid-1980s and vowed “not to go there”. The mid-1980s were a time challenged by the strains of radical economic and political restructuring and, in many cases, concurrent extensive drought conditions. These daughters lived through major family and farming stresses, during which their mothers often went to work off-farm to keep the farm household financial and functioning. At the time, such change was extraordinary but borne out of necessity.

From participants’ accounts, this major re-positioning, in the place and responsibility imposed on those farming mothers in the 1980s, caused two major changes. Firstly, the families saw the pressures their mothers were put under as they fought to support their farms’ weakened financial positions and to protect the fragility of what they (and their husbands in particular) often saw as a loss of personal status. Many of these farms were lost as families were forced to sell them and accept an exiting package. Secondly, this enforced change-of-status for the women, was generally sustained. The women, while working initially out of necessity, for security or need of family-household income, eventually came to identify through their work. As a result, they enjoyed a new found sense of distinction or status. At the time of their marriage though, this need was unheard of and unthinkable. One farm woman reflecting on her position in the late 1970s told of how, when she chose to work after marriage, she was scorned by her mother-in-law and was a source of gossip in the community. It seemed that for a woman to want to work off-farm indicated a resistance to what the community saw as the soul of rural life. This soul required the

wife on-farm, exclusively directed to supporting her farmer husband in a myriad of ways but, importantly, fully accessible to the farm. This woman's husband was pitied and she was viewed as somewhat of an outsider and not a real member of the women's collective. This viewpoint has an embedded history challenged more recently by both personal and economic need.

From this, we see that the sociocultural histories of farm daughters influence choice and isolate points of resistance. Young women who 'knew' from observing their mothers struggles during their childhoods and through experiencing the cultural constructs and constraints, may see the life as a burden rather than idyllic. Yet for others the idyllic image sustains. Newcomers, though, from urban backgrounds, may be more easily influenced by the rural idyll in their quest to become and to belong.

### ***Women's place in the rural idyll***

This history is based on a certain image of farming and rural life. In New Zealand, farmers and farming have been historically viewed as the 'backbone of the country' with farm life seen as idyllic. It carried huge political clout and prestige, with farmers being well represented and highly influential in parliament up to the 1980s (e.g. Belich, 2001). It was coming from this 'known' culture that two of the farmers' daughters interviewed were pleased to be marrying onto farms and to be able to live the life they knew. Other women from small rural servicing towns (e.g. Rachel, Anne and Sarah) had also grown up with the idea that farming was a great way of life and, likewise, were pleased to be marrying a farmer. They looked forward to becoming one of them, that is, the farmers' wives that they had admired from a distance and maybe been envious of in many ways. After all, New Zealand farming families had had thirty years of relatively comfortable life on the land, or so was the perception (Belich, 2001). Farmers and their wives often drove around in large new cars and gave an air of conspicuous affluence.

As a child living in a state housing area in the city of Christchurch, I considered my country cousins to be rich as they visited us in their brand new Ford Fairlane while we had a very ancient model Dodge. The big wings on the Fairlane seemed symbolic of success, class, opulence and excess, while the old Dodge was merely functional, but our status symbol all the same. There was a growing

rural/urban divide at that time so it was not surprising that young women from rural servicing towns were flattered to be moving up the rungs of the social ladder.

Such women, from urban rurality as they entered farming, brought some knowledge with them, of what it means to be a farmer's wife. They had been in the position of observing farm women from some distance, often in the process of their working lives or through friendships with farming peers. Such women, on marrying a young aspiring farmer, fully embraced farming and quickly assumed positions of apprenticeships in both practical farming and also its culture. While these women had to learn the groundwork, farmers' daughters, entered with a belief that they knew what they were getting themselves into. Yet, while it may be expected that there would be an advantage being a farmer's daughter this doesn't always seem to be the case. The farm daughters very readily saw their mothers' lives reflected in their experiences: a knowledge which is foreign to the in-migrants from towns and cities. As Kate reflected on being a farm daughter:

.... Mum used to do most of the farmwork and trained us girls to be inside, you know. Then when Mum got sick of it, Dad – he thought, well, he didn't want to carry on dairying either so they went into sheep and crop after that. ... And when I left school at fifteen (because Mum was sick and having my brother at the time) I carried on and helped Dad on the farm for a couple of years as a landgirl. ... Yes, and then, of course, I was hankering – I wanted a city job so I moved to (the city) probably for about five years I think – worked in (the city) and flatted and whatever. When I met Ted ... he wasn't farming at the time, he was working for a contractor and hay baling and I think I nearly freaked out when he said that all he wanted to do was to go dairying. And I thought 'oh he'll never be able to do it' but eventually we DID. And I thought 'OH NO!' (laughs). But you do it because you've got the background and you just do it. (Kate)

Many of those who come from a city, though, seem to enter farming life with a freshness that is quite different from Kate's informed cautiousness. They refer to an excitement of the new and unknown with some naiveté and innocence. Bronwyn came from a large city in Europe and met her husband while doing her OE (overseas experience) in New Zealand. She recalls:

What were my expectations? I used to make a joke of it that Nick would say 'we go jet-boating and hang-gliding and ski in the winter' and I thought 'well that sounds not too bad'. But I mean, well gosh, you work for minor wages and we lived in a house that was totally run down and a garden that hadn't been cared-for for more than 20 years. Did I really realise quite what life was going to be like? I don't know – is it naiveté? ... No I can't say that I ever

really consciously thought of what my expectations were – we never did go hang-gliding (laughing). But I just think it's a case of how adaptable human beings can be if you want to be. (Bronwyn)

These women, like me, genuinely wanted to be with their chosen life-partners and never consciously questioned what their position might be within the farming complex. So, the rural idyll as an image of a woman's life as a farm wife has been dominant both within mythology and also in the memory, it seems, for some farm daughters. Some of these women willingly sought to become farm wives in that idyllic image. For some though the reality was to prove vastly different.

### **'Becoming' as an act of trust**

When I married my farming husband, I had no real knowledge of what I was getting myself into – it really was 'the unknown'. I just followed Tom, my farmer husband, about and learned as I went. I used to say I was like one of the dogs (only with less knowledge and ability), a follower who loved their/my master, greatly admired his knowledge, was enthusiastic and always willing to please and to work. It was an adventure, entering a whole new world with so much to learn and I was always up for a challenge. But it really was an act of trust following your new husband into his world. This seemed to be a common experience for the generation of women marrying in the 1970s and 1980s. They followed their husbands to where his career happened to be located. As several women have said, "We really were subservient." This subservience seemed to originate from a socialised belief that the men were the breadwinners and the women the homemakers. In my days in the city, nursing at a large hospital, you certainly got the impression from peers, workmates and from patients, that you were privileged in some way to be marrying a farmer, but maybe I was deaf to other views. There were pressures on the men too, to provide a life for their family. And Tom had dreams for us as a team, owning our own farm eventually and living the idyllic life; raising a family on the land, our land. While I was happy to follow that dream too, I now know that it was with little understanding of what it entailed. It is clear that, initially, at least, it was *his* dream rather than *ours*, although for me the escape from my lower class city upbringing was refreshing and hopeful. Coming or 'becoming' into a new position, it seems, is relative to what one has seen in one's own upbringing. Is it progress or a step backwards? This depends on one's sociocultural history and whether the mythology is accepted as a 'truth' or seen as a

restriction. But once one ‘chooses’ to become, the challenge of constructing a sense of belonging requires adapting to the new culture and its expectations and impositions; a challenge for city entrants.

### *Lack of city girls attracted to farming/farmers*

Kate interestingly made an observation that there were not many wives that came from cities but that she observed that they were often “the good ones” who enthusiastically “got stuck into the work”. She wondered aloud, “Though, you wonder how they sort of fit in for a starter, anyway you know, cause it’s a whole new, different culture really, isn’t it?” For me as a city person the change was both enormous and exciting. I enjoyed the sounds of the country and its sheer difference to my life in the city. Strangely enough, the often very physically tiring work and long hours, made one feel important. In many ways, this participation was one of relationship, rather than work, as you sought to become part of a couple and absorb the cultural identity of the farming family and farming community. The other farm women, like the men, rewarded you with their admiration if they heard that you were assimilating into *their* world. If it became known that you had been seen carting hay, for instance, you really grew in stature. It also gave you some sense of acceptance and the beginnings of ‘belonging’.

As my knowledge of farm life grew, it gave access to discourse along with social standing. In my early days as a new farm wife, most conversations with other local women centred on how to learn these apprenticeships of farming and its culture. The more experienced women were a huge font of knowledge when I needed to know how much food to give to the shearers and of what this food should consist. I didn’t really *want* to know, but I really did *have* to know and others were more than willing to inform me, as many had been through the same quite tense experience at some stage. Now, though, my ignorance revealed and authenticated their acquired knowledgeable status. However, this process was also competitive between the women and your progress and competencies were both openly and covertly observed and rated. So, a desire to belong requires some submission and readiness to learn the ropes. But for some, as one woman said, it can resemble “breaking-in a horse” - a type of settling in or settling down. Disturbingly, for some participants, this form of

'accommodation' displays an image of breaking one's spirit, further illustrated in successive chapters while discussing contestations between self and culture.

Each cohort though, (i.e. those women who married in the 1970s and 1980s compared to those marrying in the 1990s and 2000s) lives through different times with each contributing to change either subtly or overtly. For instance, while the farm women of the 1980s opened the way for off-farm work due to necessity, the younger generation are now seeking change more for their sense of self.

### **Generational difference: growing resistance**

These different motivations for participation in, or avoidance of, farm-life indicate generational difference. It seems that the currently younger-generation (i.e. those marrying in the 1990s and 2000s) having lived through the political change of the 1980s, have a different attitude and 'sense of self' than earlier generations of women. They are more likely to have been subtly influenced by the second wave of feminism from the 1970s, both vicariously through subtle changes in their mothers' attitudes and also through other influences like schooling, during their formative years. Rachel was one young woman who very soon drew her line in the sand. She was a strong negotiator right from the start of her decision to marry a farmer.

I've never actually been a great farmer's wife and that's fine. And Andy knows that. And he's always known that - and I would still move to town in a heartbeat. I don't consider myself to *'love'* the country. You know, when I married Andy I knew he was a farmer and that would be the lifestyle. ... And Andy said to me 'well' and he was honest, he said 'we can't all (live in town). You can't expect me to move into town, what else am I going to do, I'm a farmer'. And he's dead right, and that is true. ... (but) I also knew that at the other end we would come out of it and (within a few years) we would live closer to town or be in town or something like that. (Rachel)

It seems consistent with other stories of women taking up farming in recent times that Rachel could understand her partner's position, and she was prepared to put her own hopes and needs on hold, albeit with reluctance. It seems to be a case of reluctant or negotiated compliance; a trade-off of 'self', temporarily at least, in favour of a personal relationship and often justified, to some extent, by early motherhood. Rachel continues, though, to be a strong negotiator and is determined to reignite her own personal aspirations in the near future or, more specifically, when her oldest child completes his local schooling and requires other higher-schooling arrangements in a

provincial town or city. It seems this rite of passage for her children is also to be a rite of passage for her as she sees the potential for a point of negotiation for both her mothering and also to pursue her own ambitions and needs; a common theme in this study. Rachel is already negotiating this position strongly and on a regular basis with her husband. As she puts it, “It is the main topic of conversation in our household at the moment.”

Becoming, for Rachel is both transitional and conditional. Through resisting any sense of permanence and any strong relationship to ‘being’ a farm wife or woman, Rachel is trading off ‘a sense of belonging’ for her sense of self and related dreams. In the context of this research, her determination to have time for her ‘self’, even if it means selling the farm, shows foresight and strength. It is likely that her experiences in earlier life, living in a male dominated home, contributes critically to these abilities to negotiate.

### **Division of labour: reproduced through ‘apprenticeship’**

One critical area of the women’s personal histories is their experience of the division of labour in households during childhood. All but one of the women interviewed grew up in homes with a traditional division of household labour and gender relations. Rachel, as the exception, had an absent mother and so her Dad “was both Mum *and* Dad [to her and her brother] - he did everything”. Those from farming backgrounds, though, were used to both the domestication of the farm woman’s role and also the expectation and need for their labour on the farm. Yet, as children, this crossover of dual roles was not expected of their male siblings. As Helen put it:

...the boys, they didn’t have to help Mum, did they? Oh, no! They didn’t use to do the garden cause that was girl’s stuff; they didn’t have to clean windows because that was girl’s stuff but like I said the girls also went out to help Dad. That puts it in perspective, eh? (Helen)

To some degree, these women as farmers’ daughters did an apprenticeship in which their mother initiated them into the domesticated role, while they learned outside work by “going out with Dad or the men” and helping with the farm work. They graduated to work entailing more responsibility over time. Helen recalled:

I think we were actually very independent children. We were *very* well trained. Mum used to go into town every couple of weeks to get her groceries and go and see grandma - so she did that and as children we went to town so

rarely that I can remember now the times when we went. Cause it was such a big thing to do. ... When Mum went into town we would arrive home from school and there would be a wee note there of what we were to do. We were still at primary school and yet we could turn our hand to cooking a dinner that would be for at least one workingman plus the three boys who had started coming home again to work. So it wasn't just a snack it was a proper dinner for adult people. And we didn't think anything of it. (The note) would say 'the meat's in the oven, do the potatoes and veggies and whatever' and we used to do puddings and everything in those days. So you'd just do it. (Helen)

Both Helen and Kate vividly recall the hard life their mothers had on their farms. Kate desperately didn't want to go "down that road" but a sense of duty led her in her least desired direction. Helen described her competence and how she and her sister in fact relieved their Mum at times so that she could go out on the farm "for a break".

Oh, dear old Mum! Mum's life was hard – I look at my mother's life now and it makes you realise just how hard they worked. We always had a workingman and a married couple but it was 6,500 acres. ... I could sew when I was about 10 so I would make clothes for the other (neighbours) kids. I did a woman's job when I was just a kid and didn't think anything of it – but I was very capable you see. I could turn my hand at anything. In many ways I was never a child ... (Helen)

With almost too much ease she slipped back into continuing these roles of caring and nurturing as a young farm wife because of:

... my domestic training! Yeah, I was trained – that's probably why Lester chose me – I've got good breeding hips, a mother who could cook well, mother who looked okay in her fifties (laughs) - it looked like, you know 'this one could turn out okay' - not too much of a risk! (Helen)

Although she seems to embrace her quite traditional role as a farm wife Helen denies a love of her work.

What is this *love* thing – where does *love* come into it? I think that if you don't know any difference it's just a part of your life but it probably has given me a reasonable sort of attitude to work, that – I don't very often feel like I'm working. ... But as a new wife you sort of did what was expected of you when we were first married. (Helen)

In many ways, Helen is still very much doing what is expected of her. It is almost as if she was too well trained and to radically change would be too traumatic. Although she very much has a heavy workload she doesn't normally see it as work. However, Helen sees her role as different from that of an urban housewife with the entanglement of "husbands in and out all day" wanting "help or food or something". And she "just

loves a day when Lester is away now” so that she can have time for her self. Home and farm-household are definitely her domains although one gets the feeling it has become a bind. As one woman put it, “It’s like a life-sentence, really.” So, these women’s childhood experiences of the division of household labour appear to have legacies, albeit of different kinds. These experiences mediated assumptions from which these women accessed perceptions of how one became a farm wife and subsequently came to belong to farming life and the wider farming community.

### **‘Reserve army’, alienation and isolations**

For these women participants, the expected roles included that of filling in when needed. This support though was not returned in the farm household. While none of the women had husbands who were particularly domesticated, most did take the children out working with them, at times, to allow the woman to get on with her work or to give her a break. This is quite common with pre-school aged children while older children progressively take part in the farm activities, in effect subliminally seeking to reproduce the line of farmers through an apprenticeship. This, in itself, is an issue with farm women spoken to as often just when they are getting into a farming routine, they need to step aside for their children returning home to farm. They describe reverting to the reserve army role once again, losing their status and sense of position, as their children then take on the privileged work-roles. This, then, places the woman back into the domestic role as the children, after working outside on the farm, return to the house “starving and wanting a major meal of their liking”. As a result, the intermingling of home and farm, which becomes all-encompassing, is problematic and for many women becomes soul-destroying. It is a source of isolation and loneliness. These isolations, which have continuity throughout their lives as farm women, range from geographical to social and emotional detachments supported by financial, intellectual and genderised isolations. These detachments and isolations are often manifested as conflicts and tensions within major life events such as becoming a parent, giving up one’s known career and all the adjustments such changes entail.

So from the above, we know that farm women enter into the marriage initially through an emotional bond. While seeming to willingly ‘become’ a farm wife, in reality they are often overcome by the pressures of the farming culture and their desire to please and to be useful. They sometimes have a need to be seen to be part of the

business of farming, which often places them in the roles of supporter and helper, as needs exist. However, all express a need to keep busy. With some willingness, but at times in spite of their 'self', these women describe a total immersion in the farm and in their husband's career and life. This need of busyness seems to encourage, or even result in, young farm women having larger families as they seek to create a career for their 'self' within their geographical parameters. They seem to seek a social grouping and value through their family and parenting roles.

So, a desire to belong requires some submission and readiness to learn the ropes and to mix socially within the community. For some it may more accurately be described as settling down or settling in, a sense of becoming that may be both transitional and conditional. But, through resisting any sense of permanence and any strong relationship to 'being' a farm wife or woman, some women trade off 'a sense of belonging' for their sense of self and related dreams. However, as discussed in the next section, this process of 'becoming' has its own issues and challenges for young women as they cope with the isolations commonly experienced by mothers with young children. As one woman said wistfully, "It is a really nice lifestyle *you've just got to be really happy doing it.*"

### **Mothering: keeping busy but lacking esteem**

The women often described mothering as the role and function that kept them busy for a number of years and yet which they didn't necessarily enjoy. While most saw mothering as the most important job there is there was a qualification to the statement. Several of them talked about how depressed they felt during that lengthy period of ten or more years of childbearing and rearing. One woman claimed she wouldn't have children if she had her time over again. Another said she cried upon learning she was having her third child. She had enough problems with her extended farming family without having another child to care for. It seems that while these women saw at least part of their job as looking after the children they questioned the effects that pressures of mothering, combined with farming, had on their own sense of wellbeing. Ironically, though, they often deliberately extended their period of mothering by having another child as an after thought. It seems dilemmatic that while successive children prolonged the women's career of parenting and the sense of value that came with it, they often felt incongruent and unvalued compared to when they were

working at their careers, prior to marriage and children. Two women described how as senior registered nurses they were valued in the health system and granted esteem, rank and importance both in the hospital and in their farming district. Yet when they left work to care for their children and to work on the farm no one was interested in what they were doing. As one put it, she was “a nothing”. They, commonly, felt unvalued, unrecognised and even invisible. After a period of eight to ten years of mothering and farming, they indicated that they had neither the energy nor confidence to return to work, with one calling the farm her “ball and chain”.

This sentiment vividly illustrates conflicting tensions where farm women see mothering as a very important role and yet feel unvalued and often unwell with the combined pressures and constancy of farm, family and community while often adjusting simultaneously to a new culture. It appears that during this stage a range of isolations merge to lessen the woman’s sense of self and sense of value. But there are exceptions when legitimate support and mentoring is available. While Bronwyn had effective support and mentorship from her mother-in-law others reported experiencing a lack of support. For many, positions of farm, family and wider social and cultural responsibilities are detrimental to care of ‘self’. Successfully navigating these positions has been seen historically as the essence of being a good farm wife, but for many this has become, or is becoming, unsustainable. For some, these conflicts seem to be the root of tensions which, as unresolved matters, suppurate over time forcing transformative action. Yet, for others a sense of acceptance or resignation prevails. It seems, then, that learning how to cope in relative isolation and learning how to be resourceful and resilient, concurrently with mothering, is essential to ‘becoming’ a farm woman. Often though, this process builds major personal conflict; conflict tied to a range of tensions as the woman struggles for personal esteem.

During these challenging times, the women, without exception, talked of the place and pressures of food provision. As one young woman said, even if she was having a terrible day with her three pre-schoolers, and someone rang asking for a cake or other food for a district function or for fundraising, she would “never say no” even though she rarely finds time to bake for herself. This is because she fears such a rejection would lead to her being talked about and dismissed. As a young farm woman she is trying to find her place in her community; trying to fit in, to ‘belong’ and more importantly to feel a personal sense of purpose. So, ‘becoming’ also requires engaging with sets of communal expectations and roles that some women

may be unready or unable, at that time, to perform. Yet they lack the supportive environment needed to express their difficulties in attempting to fulfil those roles.

Building on and elaborating these sets of sentiments, the following section describes both historical and current experiences of the place of food in the lives and identity of farming women. Although the perception is of a changing emphasis on such domestication, these pressures persist in reality. Food and related services remain a considerable part of the work, life and identity of rural women as this next section illustrates. While it is clear that the new generation of farm wives resist some of the expectations placed upon them by the norms of farming life, many are still affected appreciably by expectations surrounding food and other related support and helping within the farming enterprise. Social and cultural pressures and expectations are difficult to resist especially when a woman has traded-off critical images of her 'known' self in an effort to become and to belong.

### **The place of food in farm women's identities**

While there has been a gradual change over the last thirty years regarding the place and importance of food in rural communities, provision of food and keeping the stores up continues to be a major component of 'becoming' and 'being' a farm wife. Availability of food and its provision remains an important part of a farm family's day to day efficiencies and survival strategies in times of crisis. As such, it is part of the resourcefulness and resilience required by farm women. During times of extreme climatic events like snows, floods, droughts and other major disruptions, these farm women freely and willingly assume a number of roles in maintaining the farm household and the farm itself; times when food is essential sustenance and fuel, while often being a scarce commodity. There seems little doubt though, that provision of food for 'the men' is also some generalised form of matriarchal exercise, in which some form of power and control is exerted over other women seen as less capable in that domain. It also protects and preserves an expression, at least, of the important role that some women defend for their own sense of place. This provision in itself is problematic as it further shackles the woman to her subservient role; an ambivalence arises of being secure in 'place', or being free and 'lost'.

It seems difficult, for farm women, to isolate the provision of food from the roles of helping and family care. While food on farms, traditionally, takes on another

dimension, partly due to distance and hospitality, it is undoubtedly also as a form of matriarchal pride and an exercise of self and competence by some women. To be able to provide food at a moment's notice is attestation to fulfilling the role of a 'good farm wife'. While the content may have changed from cream cakes to more healthy food, the sentiment remains. However, it seems there is generational change ensuing, although not as big a breakthrough as some would like to believe. Although some young women are maintaining the traditional ritual, others are resisting, albeit tempered by the need to fulfil cultural pressures. This ambivalence of resistance seems to be particularly common to the younger generation of farm women, represented in this case by Rachel. She describes women up her valley "rebellious at the moment, refusing to cook for shearers" (who can provide for themselves as contractors) but conceding to cook for the tailing gang (usually local farmers who assist with the ritual of docking tails and marking young lambs for owner-identification). Many also "don't actually help on the farm ... unless it's desperate". As Rachel says, she "*chooses* not to". Gradually, she just "slowly started saying no" and thinks her husband "just probably got used to it so it has carried on from there". It's interesting here, though, that local men in the tailing gang are still fed well (and competitively), while change is being forged with more remote men as in the shearing contractors. It seems some anonymity helps in this process of resistance. So, while there is continuity and discontinuity in the exercise of this cultural practice, transformation seems directed more towards securing and maintaining social acceptance and a place for 'self' with the local community i.e. through the localised tailing gang. In this way, their efforts to belong are directed towards the immediate community rather than more generalised cultural expectations.

### **Different cohorts, different expectations**

This resistance, continuity and transformation exemplify a stronger level of social and individual negotiation by these younger women than the previous generation, who while trying to negotiate, gave way to social pressures more easily. Yet, the division of labour in the house still holds with tradition. In addition, the task of becoming a mother and caring for children provides a negotiating point for some separation from helping out on the farm. Rachel confesses:

I feel that I'm here really to support - to support Andy, and I'm more than happy to do that and look after him and the children – that's fine. But if I lived in town I wouldn't be expected, I mean maybe you would go out and help in the yard but you wouldn't be expected to go out and lift a thousand sheep and cut off their tails if you didn't like to do it. ... But in saying that – if I'm at home, like today, Andy will come in at lunchtime and say, 'ohh what's for lunch' and so he expects me, if I'm at home, that perhaps I should do him lunch. (Rachel)

Although when they lived together prior to marriage, her partner did his share of the cooking, things changed with marriage and especially when she stopped working at her career to have children. That role of provision fell to her by default. In describing her early experiences cooking for shearers and others she said:

Yes I did, but *not willingly*. ... Oh yes, it was huge. I moaned and groaned the whole time and I still moan and groan and yes that was really huge. That was a really big expectation of Andy's that I would be there and that I would be cooking and that I wasn't supporting him if I didn't do it. Because he was along the lines of 'that's the least you can do. I'm sort of out there working hard and you can't even cook me a meal. What are you doing all day?' – So, that was a really big thing – that was really huge. (Rachel)

Rachel reflected that:

... You have to be really strong. (My) advice to a young woman as a new farming wife would be ... if they were just starting out I would say now to him what you expect and what you don't expect. It's too easy to fall into the trap when you're still working to be commuting and then all of a sudden, if you have children, you are in the thick of it. And they need to know before that, what you are prepared to do and not do and how you're prepared to live, really.

We discussed the concept that as farm women when we meet a man and choose to marry him, we don't only marry him, we marry his farm too and often his extended family.

Yes and we do too! And like I said, Andy said to me 'well ... you can't expect me to move into town, what else am I going to do, I'm a farmer.' ... But as I said to him (recently), 'you know I've been here and supported you for the last however many years now [approximately eight years] and now I need you to support me'. (Rachel)

It is important for Rachel and her group of young farm women friends, who live in quite a geographically-isolated area, to know that eventually they will have their turn at living their aspirations and retraining for new careers. It is difficult for her to

identify through her work, as she is unsure that her work is valued. She sees her work primarily as “cooking and cleaning ... looking after the children and Andy, and making sure they are all happy and well cared for ...” While she considers this *work* she doubts that her husband “really considers that what I do is a job like I do”. She stresses the need to keep everyone well cared for and happy, no mean feat in anyone’s terms. However, from my decades of experience as a member of New Zealand’s farming culture, I see little evidence that the caring and domestic work of farm women is genuinely valued; that they are valued as a productive unit on the farm or that their personal needs and work are given credence. They really are seen (and see themselves) as helpers and sounding boards, in effect partial and peripheral participants. Such participation with limited intellectual stimulation is problematic regarding the pursuit of both senses of ‘being’ and of ‘belonging’.

Adding to these issues of dependency and control, which build as tension over time, is financial isolation. This, in some cases, is experienced as an overt exercise of power. The following section looks at how some of the women have experienced the issue of financial dependence in their farming lives as a critical adjustment in ‘becoming’ a farm wife.

### **Financial isolation in a profit-driven business**

Since the 1980s, N.Z. farming has increasingly become a profit-driven business, in which, for most, the rural idyll and its lifestyle are elusive and illusionary. Often, women’s needs are rejected as not a good financial decision or not good use of money while the men’s needs go unquestioned. Unless women are working off-farm they usually do not have their own source of income. And often any off-farm income is needed to maintain the household and family, so is inclined to be used for essentials, rather than for personal spending. Some women, like Anne, accept that they are ‘given’ money when they are going to town while others find that too restricting and resent the dependency. Yet others feel controlled by external agents and agencies like bankers or farm advisers, which Kate described as being “like big brother”. She conceded though that she “probably didn’t stick up for myself enough either”. This constant battle contributed greatly to Kate’s depleted energy level and loss of tolerance for farming.

Through the tough times of drought and political restructuring of the economy (impositions, which impacted greatly on them as a farming family), Kate went to work off-farm to buy the children shoes and other essentials. Their limited housekeeping allowance had to be accounted for strictly and kept quite separate from the farm finances. She felt some bitterness towards her husband and the farm itself, due to the prolonged financial hardship when, in her view, money was not always wisely spent on-farm. As she put it she “felt conned actually”. This financial pressure continued for most of the 27 years of Kate’s marriage and life on the farm. While as a farming couple they had assets worth many millions of dollars, they lived a very restrictive life that Kate accepted in the early years but, which she tried to negotiate differently in latter years. She wanted some financial relief but it was not forthcoming as they kept increasing the farm size and consequently increased their financial burden. For her, the different isolations all merged into one. She was geographically isolated; she had few friends and no one that she felt she could confide in freely. She was socially and emotionally isolated and her financial isolation and heavy workload restricted her ability to manage these other issues. This contributed greatly to her eventually leaving her farm-marriage.

Other women told similar stories that indicated some sense of financial control and personal authority over them. These financial hardships were maintained, by most, over the years, as droughts, the need to increase the size of the farms to maintain viability and the constant lack of profitability were repeatedly reiterated by farm and financial advisors. It also has become a habit, a part of rural ideology; that money is reinvested in the farm rather than the family. This is often accompanied by a sense of pride (particularly by the male farmer and his advisors) if a family can live off ‘nothing’. This profit-driven, patriarchal ideology is one, though, in which younger women do not easily participate. As one put it, “We do not do subservience easily.” Prior to marriage they have been earning their own money and have been financially independent. Subsequently, they don’t easily accept the need to ask for, or be given money when they need it, while justifying that need. This is especially so when they are working hard contributing to the farm income and when they often see money spent on-farm with little or no consultation with them.

This attitude and need for resistance to becoming totally dependent on the husband for access to money and for household decisions, seems related to women’s lack of real empowerment regarding farm finances. While it is often thought that farm

women do have control over the finances, for the women spoken to, it is more commonly responsibility for the more routine financial tasks of paying accounts and maybe doing the GST (Goods and Services Tax). Full responsibility and ability for independent decision-making seems another matter. It seems that this financial dependence in some ways predicates other opportunities and choices in life as one can't afford it. Decisions regarding seeking further possibilities for the 'self' are often aborted, due to it not being a good economic decision, when often it would be a good decision for other reasons. As one young man pointed out to me, his father "could always find \$60,000 for a new tractor or something but he could never find the \$600 needed for a new washing machine for Mum." This illustrates the patriarchal authority over women that underpins a related matriarchal control and aggression. Some farm women overtly use matriarchal authority to 'police' and control other women, especially those with a perceived lesser status or social standing (e.g. Mavin, 2006). It seems while some may have learned well this type of power and control, others rebel against it, refusing to be part of the ideology, a theme developed through this thesis.

In summary, financial isolation like emotional, intellectual and social isolations is often endorsed and replicated by living in a culture, which is still male dominated and where women are generally isolated from other like-minded women. This genderised isolation seems critical to the continuance of other isolations, with most women interviewed being unable to declare any female friends in whom they could confide and with whom they could freely discuss personal issues. Consequently, as issues like financial systems are considered too private to discuss, their situation is presumed the norm as variations are unknown. These farm women do not know what other women's experiences are, whether they personally are being unreasonable or whether they are "being conned", as Kate put it. Becoming a farm wife, then, requires accommodating the male dominated gender and power relations or, as is becoming more common particularly with the younger generation, resisting the norm and negotiating a position outside control. By exposing some of these issues of dominance and manipulation, participation in this research is allowing some farm women to have necessary conversations, which are essential to discovering a fair partnership with their husbands.

These dependencies, in effect, relegate 'becoming' to 'denying self'. Challenging these socially-accepted norms and deeply embedded traditions requires

developing negotiating skills in order to claim a position that lessens such vulnerabilities; which seem to deny recognition of a woman's role and her work. The next section, then, examines some of the contradictions facing these women within gender and power relations as they seek to 'become'. In seeking to 'belong', the women invariably demonstrate pleasing behaviours, which through being rewarded socially and culturally then reinforce and maintain the patriarchal social norm. These issues related to patriarchal power and subsequent issues of productivity on the farm become more complicated in the extended-family-farm complexes. It is these relationships that mediate the process of belonging and becoming.

The next major section elaborates the argument while drawing conclusions towards issues of 'becoming and belonging within complex power and gender relations'. It further advances issues of the continual conflict between cultural and social positioning and the needs of self. Issues relating to patriarchal, matriarchal and cultural power and dominance are discussed with particular attention to issues in extended farming families. The critical place of social inclusiveness or exclusiveness in constructing a sense of belonging is pursued (Reimer, 2004; Shortall, 2004a, 2004b). Exertion or neglect of one's self through periods of contestation, subjugation and resistance are illustrated as challenges. New insight into the power of the matriarch is revealed in this discussion.

### **Becoming and belonging within complex power and gender relations**

Gender and power relations are seen to maintain the favoured status quo through rewarding conformity and punishing difference (Connell, 1987). This interplay between gender and power relations is persistent and sustained traditionally by women's participation in the established farming culture. However, resistance to this spurious participation seems to be gaining traction. It is through controlling behaviours and maintaining a perception of being valued that unequal power relations are maintained and sustained. Socially interdependent cultures like farming by their very nature seem to favour the collective rather than the individual, the social rather than the agentic, which further disadvantage diversity (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These complexities, discussed further in the next section, reduce women's 'choice' to a few possibilities by stigmatising other departures (Connell, 1987). It

seems gender and power relations are invariably merged (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987, 2002).

### **Masculinities, femininities and women's work**

Although masculinities and femininities are plural and multiple (Lupton, 2000), masculinities in work (as hegemonies) are based on the power of decisions, both financial and organisational. This is a crucial point, as it seems, from the experiences of these women, that those who are more subservient, are left with the more routine, less complex and repetitive tasks. Part of this compliancy is reproduced through women inadvertently 'becoming' masculinised, to some degree, due to gendered isolation; not knowing other women's experiences and personal struggles. The women, invariably, are unable to name really good confiding women friends like they had when they were single. They describe 'becoming blokey' over time, possibly due to some degree of masculinisation. One woman in the field confided in me, "I think we lose our femininity. It's just so easy to get around in sloppy old clothes and do all these things – just getting into the habit of doing all the things we do ... running farm errands and filling in where needed." She added, "Eventually you think, 'Why did I do that for twenty-odd years?' "

It seems over time that women are initiated through these kinds of experiences, not necessarily through choice but through circumstances. They learn to think, converse and be amused in what is considered a 'blokey' or 'male' way. But as Bronwyn (an immigrant from Europe) put it, this for her was not by choice but through necessity and as a survival strategy (e.g. Butler, 1997). As these farm women live in a male dominated world, most of their daily contact is inevitably with men. They need to learn to converse suitably and knowledgeably if they wish to be accepted with any credibility. Farm-raised Louise, though, described the trade off between becoming masculinised and 'losing' the ability to relate to female company. She related, "Yeah, farming is really a blokey world. ... It's the sense of humour and conversations for sure ..." She went on to describe how she now had trouble talking with women because she was more used to conversing with men, stating "With men you can strike up a conversation about the rugby or the weather or stockwork – whereas with a woman what do you talk about?" While Louise strongly stated that she "hated" going to her children's playgroup and similar places where the conversations

with other women were about babies and children, she reported that before long, she became quite isolated from her own gender.

Louise, in her preference for male discourse, went on to describe a thirst to be well-informed and the recognition and rewards then granted by some men, as she assumed a position of knowledge. This gave her some legitimacy. Through engagement and participation (Lave, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Billett, 2001a, 2001b) Louise progressed towards the sense of mastery that she desired, as she sought to be fully recognised as a farmer. Towards this end, she seems to have assumed the common set of 'male' values of 'outside' work being more valued than 'inside' work i.e. that farm-work has more value than that of childcare and household work (Whatmore, 1991a, 1991b). And yet she described an ambivalent position as she neither fitted fully in the male or female domains but rather remained on the outskirts of both. The process of masculinisation seems to have a restricting effect on a woman's sense of place and belonging. It alienates women from each other and restrains open relationships that could lead to some solidarity; in effect it silences women who then become alienated from their 'self' (Hazen, 2006). They experience an ambivalence of roles as they ride the boundaries between being male and female involving periods of submission and complicity (Cockburn, 1991), thus limiting authentic belonging.

### *Not too male, not too female – the third sex and 'knowing'*

This ambivalence of roles introduces another genderised concept, of what Pini (2005a) called the third sex. This is where farm women often feel neither women nor men but something in-between, therefore not belonging authentically to either social grouping. Louise's claims are endorsed to some extent by most of the women. Sarah (raised in a rural servicing town), likewise, saw herself as "a man person". She also finds male conversations more interesting and avoids women who invariably talk about children and "everyday stuff", which she wants to get away from when she's out socialising. Sarah, like Louise, makes the point that, "You can learn a lot from the men about farming. You can get in a group and talk about staff and the handling of staff and what experiences they are having, and what they've done to conquer it and that's to me a hell of a lot more interesting than whose kid's just cut their first tooth (laughs)!"

It seems that learning from ‘the men’ and having reciprocal conversations is critical to ‘becoming’ and to ‘knowing’. It is unclear then why, when farm women get together, they don’t have these ‘male’ conversations with each other. It may be that the women don’t have the depth of knowledge and experience required to speak with the same authority or to maintain the range of conversations, or it may simply be that these conversations lack authenticity when held between women. It seems that when some women get together they go through stages of identifying through their children and having those conversations. Yet, others resist that identity alternatively identifying, transitionally at least, through their farm work. In doing so, their women’s knowledge, based on family, is given a lower status and is less satisfying. Working ‘on-farm’ and the construction of this working knowledge may be a means of seeking status, as it gives one access to male discourse.

In contrast, though, Rachel (also raised in a rural servicing town) actively avoids farming talk with which she feels uncomfortable. With her personal ‘choice’ of limited participation in their farming practice, she sees herself lacking in knowledge of farming. Rachel explains this with feeling, “See I shy away [from talking to men] because I think, ‘Oh god all they’re going to talk about is farming’ and I don’t have the skills to carry that through and that is the majority of what they are talking about.” In conversation, I said to Rachel that I remembered in my early years as a farm woman, thinking exactly as Rachel had just described, and then “somewhere along the way you realise that you have changed. You then find you can talk the men’s talk easier than you can talk the women’s talk.” Her response was “Oh my god, I *so* don’t want that to happen!” She is actively resisting ‘becoming’ to a position where her personal aspirations may be threatened or manipulated. Rachel noted, though, to converse authentically with the men,

You have to be *informed*. You have to have read the papers or watched the news and to have seen what is going on with current affairs. I sometimes read the paper but it’s pretty quick. At that time, like at six o’clock, you can’t sit down and watch all the television news and see what’s going on – it’s a really busy time in our house. And if I’m talking to (other young mothers), you do talk about your children and your family because that is your life, that’s your job in a way – what else have you been able to do – I mean you might have been to town but you’ve been with your children. (Rachel)

While Rachel claims her children are her work and interest, Louise identifies more strongly with farming. It seems that the difference is whether one accommodates the

dominant culture or resists it as Rachel is determined to do. This may support the view that cultures the most resistant to changes for the betterment of women, are often the most masculinist (Pettman, 1995, 1997). It seems there is a connection between women succumbing to masculinisation and constructing a sense of loyalty to the dominant culture, at least in a transitional stage. But for Rachel and her group of supportive young farm women, it is very important to maintain their femininity. Through growing up in a male dominated urban household Rachel seems to have constructed a strong sense of gender for her 'self' although she is, likely, influenced by her group of peers; a rare example, of sisterhood among farm women, by all accounts. She describes resisting becoming 'blokey' or even what she sees as a typical farm wife i.e. one who wears practical clothes as she runs errands in town for her husband. As one of the younger women interviewees, Rachel is strongly motivated to keep and retain her own identity and not to succumb to what she sees as the localised norm. She questions her ability to be a *good* farmer's wife and in asking her to clarify what she saw as a good farmer's wife, she said:

Oh, there is a lot of debate going on in our (district) at the moment (laughs). What I would categorise (as a good farm wife) is this for me (laughs): You would quite *happily* cook for shearers and the tailers, and, you know how you would have an agent drop in? Well, you would just whip out a wonderful spread for lunch (laughs) ... I like having people to stay, but I hate cooking, and I know that's part of it and so people who come here know that we just sort of cruise along. But with the expectation of people (farm-servicing personnel) dropping in for lunch I always think, 'oh my god what am I going to give them?' Oh, and just sort of helping on the farm, saying 'yes sure I'll come out and help you tail' and those sort of things. They're very capable, outdoors-persons perhaps, which I tend not to be. I don't like to get dirty. (Rachel)

Rachel's remark that she "doesn't like to get dirty" seems critical, as one might assume getting dirty would be an integral part of farm living; representing a core requirement of being a farm wife. Yet, she emphasises this personal preference as one which she is unwilling to negotiate; it goes beyond what she is willing to accommodate. It seems it is part of her resistance to 'becoming' a stereotypical farm-wife. The differences between what Rachel sees as a 'good' farmer's wife and how she is determined to maintain her 'self', indicates strong levels of individual agency. It seems that in 'becoming' often personal maintenance is neglected or abandoned, which more women, especially the younger generation like Rachel, are reluctant to

trade. She is supported in this (and possibly influenced) by a group of young women in her area who have similar hopes and similar views. They are a group of women who illustrate some change in attitude amongst younger farm women about 'becoming' traditional farmers' wives. They expect to have their turn to pursue their own aspirations, although one senses that Rachel has a more resolute attitude to this precondition.

This group of women may reveal a glimpse of possibilities for change if farm women really supported each other in a genuine way; with confidence and trust. But this, it seems, is rare and seems not to sustain itself. Cultural expectations, needs and norms seem to favour divide and rule thereby furnishing farm women's lack of solidarity. However, through attitudinal changes like those of Rachel and others, the sustainability of the expected loyalty and subservient commitment of women to farm, husband and family is challenged. As demonstrated, these expectations are meeting open resistance from many younger (new generation) farm women, while older farm women are increasingly making bold stands often after twenty or more years with many exiting their farm-marriages. This change, though, seems more personally agentic in action than based on any form of solidarity.

### **Strong need for 'self': A source of conflict**

Re-inventing one's 'self' in the mould of what is known to be right, is rewarded by a 'sense of belonging,' which is manifested in cultural inclusiveness. A good farm woman does certain things and participates within the culture in certain ways. Both Louise (seeking identity of farmer in her own right) and Rachel (strongly guarding her femaleness and avoiding farming roles) draw on different and personal situations that are potential sources of conflict within their immediate social practices (i.e. farms and the farm-marriage) and their wider community (i.e. farm women, farming culture). Both these positions are potential sources of isolation with consequent lack of inclusiveness in the traditional community. Neither of these women are prepared to participate in ways that "subvert and bury their real selves in efforts to secure continuity and advancement" (Billett, 2006a, p.5); either in their marriage relationships or their farming workplaces. Both describe a lack of coherence, in their roles and an inability to recognise their 'self' in their imposed roles, which risks fragmentation. While Rachel reacts by resisting becoming a typical farm wife (as she

sees it) Louise also resists becoming a different image of the same set of roles. Rachel is resisting the outside, on-farm role while Louise is resisting the inside, farm-household role. These images are individual but rooted in social experiences throughout personal histories. Both Rachel (urban-rurality raised) and Louise (farm-raised) are agentic individuals in different ways. They are making sense, constructing meaning and engaging within similar social worlds (Billett, 2006c) while reinventing their individual selves and their culture, through distinctive participation. Each, through participating authentically, then faces the conflict and tensions of not fitting the regular mould. While Louise dissociates (Billett, 2006b) or dis-identifies (Hodges, 1998) with the work and roles of mothering and the farm household, Rachel conversely seeks dissolution with farming itself. In that case ‘becoming’ is more akin to what Wertsch (1998) refers to as mastery, (i.e. an attachment of convenience, shaped by the press of the situation), than appropriation (i.e. becoming committed to that with which they have come to engage).

This is in contrast again, though, to the case of Helen who knows farming as her heritage and birthright. Critically, her perceptions were to be challenged on reflection. Both Rachel and Louise exercised resistance to power relationships in fighting for the right to transform their self (Hazen, 2006; Murray, 2007). This conflicts with the submission and complicity (Cockburn, 1991) that the previous generation described as necessary to being accepted and to having a sense of belonging. Helen though, challenged these perceptions as possible illusions; a desire to believe and accept the myth, the rural idyll. It seems ‘belonging’ may be a contested assumption.

### ***Challenging perceptions – a disillusionment***

Participation in this kind of investigation is likely to challenge perceptions, which may be unsettling and even disillusioning. Helen’s strong identification with her farming childhood and her perception that her mother was perfectly “happy with her lot” was questioned. Her mother, who had been a health professional and a career officer in the airforce during World War 2, married a pilot and followed him to a farm in what, at that time, was the ‘backblocks’ of the New Zealand high country. As Helen saw it, her mother was perfectly happy.

It (being a farmer's wife) was her life. Mum was never a demanding type of person – she never had needs that weren't met. *That sounds strange doesn't it?* [My emphasis] She probably was happy enough with having such a lovely family and in those days there were big families and you were recorded in a certain manner too according to how your home and family looked, you know. If you presented your family well, you had done well as a rural person. *That sounds funny, doesn't it?* [My emphasis] I remember – you can just imagine now back then going to the A & P [Agricultural and Pastoral] Show and you had your new shoes on and your new skirt and you'd get all dollied up to go to the Show because you were *on show*, weren't you? (Helen)

In recognising the 'strangeness' of what she was saying about her mother's life, Helen was conceding some doubt as to whether her mother really was so fulfilled with her life. In a later conversation, Helen reflected that she didn't know if her mother was really happy or if she had "just put up with it as best she could, as you do, don't you?" She wished her mother was still alive so she could talk to her about the unhappiness she had been feeling herself over the previous two years: "You can only talk to Mums about these things can't you? You don't tell others." In many ways, Helen is emulating her mother's life although from the perspective of another era and in a changing and changed world. She still holds dearly to the values and principles of earlier times and of her upbringing. In questioning her mother's sense of self and sense of identity, Helen is also questioning her own identity. This is a constant source of conflict and struggle, as she seeks to discover a perception of congruence. She seems overcome and somewhat destroyed by the fact that she is not "happy enough with having such a lovely family" as she perceived her mother was throughout her lifetime; a huge disillusionment. She now questions the legitimacy of her place, whether she really belongs. As she said "[at times] I don't know what the hell I'm doing here." But the complexity is that at this moment she doesn't belong anywhere else either.

In sum, capturing the essence of these accounts illustrates some of the struggles and conflict of living and working in a male-dominated world. This accommodation of the men's world is commonly not by choice but through necessity and as a survival strategy. The women need to learn to converse knowledgeably if they wish to be accepted; to feel a sense of 'belonging'. Most come to identify strongly with the men and masculine behaviours and values - those learned from the men. This, in effect, then reproduces these masculinised behaviours thereby sustaining a patriarchal culture. However, only time will tell whether younger women,

like Rachel, are successful in their resistant quests but she is strongly seeking to retain an individual identification. It seems from others' accounts that they 'become' farm wives in spite of their selves, not from choice but from socialisation within a dominant patriarchal system. Most identify more strongly with the men over time, although maintenance of this identification seems problematic. These farm women come to feel alienated from their true self and alienated from any supportive sisterhood. Subsequent crises of identity, experienced as struggle and conflict, are often manifested as depressive symptoms. Resolution commonly requires transformative action through individual agency often suppurating through crises. This becomes more evident as the women's stories reveal issues surrounding maintenance and transformative responses to their sense of self.

In conjunction, it has become disturbingly clear during this research that extended farm families are generative of particularly problematic inter-relations. These inter-relationships are complicated by issues concerning interdependence of farm, family, productivity, heritage and finances. Often unresolved issues from family-farm relationships were reported as building deep-seated resentments that manifest in forms of patriarchal and matriarchal control and within power struggles. These are discussed in the following section.

### **Farm marriage, matriarchy and the extended farming family**

Family farms that host several generations often have particular issues that are ignored until crisis-point occurs. As stated previously, for young women marrying into these families they often not only marry their farmer, but his family farm and his family. By all accounts, these arrangements are difficult and often problematic. As one woman, in a position with three families on the family farm said, "I feel like I'm walking on egg shells all the time. One [woman] works on the farm, another does the books but there's no real role for me. I have to go out to work off-farm just to try to feel like I'm worthwhile." Her desperation is acute but she can't see any answer to her deep anguish. Certainly, critical points have been identified indicating a linkage between the successful merging of these inter-generational family farming-enterprises and the matriarch of the family. It seems directly relational, how well she understands her 'self', her own experiences and her struggles as a farm wife, as to how she then

can understand the needs of younger women. Two contrasting examples are given from case studies.

### *Matriarchal mentorship*

Farming in the communities that comprise those women studied here, is still built around a patriarchal set of systems. Bennett (2004) sees farm women's advocacy groups sanctioning patriarchal gender relations by seeking to preserve traditional roles for women while focusing on fighting to maintain the family farm and community, rather than building a sense of women's empowerment. These sets of values seem to be predominant in extended farming families with effective matriarchal mentorship often absent. The following narratives, which comprise two contrasting examples of differing matriarch's, depict both hope and despair.

Bronwyn met her husband while travelling around New Zealand. They developed a relationship, which meant she didn't carry on with her touring plans, according to which she would have returned home to Europe, to continue her career. During the few months prior to her marriage, Bronwyn felt that she had gained an idea of what her husband's life consisted of on the family farm, which involved his parents and brother and his brother's wife. Her new mother-in-law was a strong woman and she made sure that her daughters-in-law had lives other than domestication and helping on the farm.

I had an amazing mother in law – she was quite scary visually because she was quite tall with glasses and quite a strong voice. She was a teacher and she was the representative for the area on the provincial Health Board and ... she returned to teaching after the children grew up, so she had a late-life career and was very much pro-women. Her poor sons, she must have been the bane of their lives. My sister-in-law came from the city and she was only seventeen when she got married and so she needed that support. So they (parents-in-law) were both, and still are, a wonderful support. They were a great supportive family. Yes, I am well aware of how rare that is in farming families - well aware of that now. And I guess that I would have to say that (the positive extended-family situation) contributed to the marriage working for us. The family relations were a major factor – I think that if we hadn't got on and I hadn't had that support at that stage, it could have been much more difficult – no I was welcomed into it. I mean it's never easy working and being with family but I gained a Mum and Dad and family. (Bronwyn)

Bronwyn believed that this older woman had the wisdom, power and agency that helped maintain the families and the young marriages. Her mother-in-law introduced

her to a business in the nearest small town that was a means of off-farm employment. This employment meant that she had some financial independence while mixing with stimulating people. Working on topical issues in the small local town meant that as an immigrant from a big city, she had much to learn and she enjoyed that. While this employment lasted only “a couple of years” it has held her in good stead as she has maintained that area of interest to this day. It seems that Bronwyn’s mother-in-law through her foresight and wisdom recognised the needs of the young women she nurtured, while maintaining their family farm as an economic unit. Her self-knowledge seemed to enable her to mentor and nurture the next generation. This perceptive mentorship, though, seems more rare than common as the following and contrasting example depicts. Challenging but supportive mentorship, it seems, may be a distinct base from which a young farm wife might ‘become’ and ‘belong’ (Ibarra, 2000).

### ***Matriarchal power and dominance***

As a young farm wife, Louise had a very different experience. She and her husband had been married for four years when he was called home to the family farm. As a young couple, they already had systems in place that were working for them. Louise worked part-time while being the main carer for their first child. Moving to the farm meant a big change in position for her. She had grown up on a farm where it was the norm for the girls to help outside, especially in seasonally busy periods. She loved farm-life and being part of a close community. She had seen her parents working as a partnership (which she hoped to emulate) with her mother combining farm, household and community involvement in her many roles.

However, it seems her mother-in-law had expectations that her two daughters-in-law would look after the men’s needs in the farm household, produce the next generation and keep the garden. While this may seem an idyllic life for some, it was far from that for Louise. She had a strong need to be involved outside on this fourth-generation farm with her husband. As Louise tells it, when she “went onto [her husband’s family] farm it was very much the old school. ... The men did the work and the wives just cooked the meals and did the garden.” And while she could cope with these duties she preferred to “be out with the animals” with the children “in tow”. After living in town and working part-time Louise felt a sense of isolation and

lack of worth. Consequently, even when the children were young Louise couldn't spend day after day alone with the children in the farmhouse so she tried to "push in" and would say, "What can I do today? Can I go and put a fence up? Can I go and shift the sheep? Can I drench or crutch them?" Because her sister-in-law was happy to "stay inside" concentrating on house and garden, Louise's pleas were seen as demands and as being difficult or worse still, interfering in the men's domain.

Louise described many situations where she did the work of two or more people while her sister-in-law seemed quite content to play the role of the wife at home. This caused conflict and resentment as Louise became increasingly dependent on farm work for her 'sense of self'. While she identified as a farming woman who did her share of the outside work, it would seem the other young woman identified as a more traditional farmer's wife and householder. Their mother-in-law was very much the gatekeeper and the matriarch. In the eyes of Louise this woman rewarded the other daughter-in-law while rejecting her. While personalities almost certainly came into the equation, it seems there was a clash of cultural expectations. Louise by her own accounts admits to being "pretty strong-minded and strong-willed, even 'pig headed', I suppose some people would call me." She was not going to capitulate and assimilate into this family's ritualised structure. She had a driving need to be mentally stimulated in ways that met her needs and to contribute to new knowledge. She was to discover, though, that farming men can be protective of their power of knowledge, which is an important aspect of their identity; of who they are. As is told later, Louise was about to cross that particular divide as she made suggestions of how their farming practices could be improved. She had out-stepped her status.

So, these two women's stories provide quite distinct journeys to become farmers' wives in which the mediating role of matriarchal power played out in particular ways. The differences seem related to how each party exercised power and also how each resisted within their particular power relationship. There are common issues here with that of gender and power relations within patriarchy which demand submission and a measure of docility which the younger generation like Louise and Rachel strongly resist.

## **Struggling for identity in extended farm families**

A critical essence of a patriarchal system consists of an intense and persistent interplay between and amongst gender relations and power relations (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987, 2002, 2005). Women, often unwittingly, have sustained and reproduced these dominant relations by either free or reluctant participation in the culture as it is known. Negotiating a change in these power relations though is problematic, with particular issues relating to the extended farming family. Challenging such situations can be destructive and fragmenting. Crossing boundaries between patriarchal power and matriarchal power seems precarious as both power bases are destructive for subordinates. Then, repeated rejection of ideas and expressions of self are stored in emotional memory and contribute to emotional isolation.

Differing versions of stories similar to Louise's became very common as I talked to farming women in their everyday lives. Often, it seems farm daughters-in-law within extended farming families, struggle for identity. Mothers-in-law, who by accounts from others are "nice" or even "lovely" people, struggle to share their power or to accept their sons' new wives, unless the wives are prepared to be their subject and live, at least to some degree, under their influence. Power struggles it seems are manifested in many small ways. For instance, one woman controlled the milk delivery to the farm and so the younger woman had to ask if she needed a bottle extra to her allotment. A reply of "oh, I suppose you can have it" was typical of the struggle of reluctance and power. In several cases, mail was delivered to a communal mail box threatening individual privacy and once again requiring interdependence. When I commented to one, that this would seem a simple thing to change, the young woman replied that it was symbolic of a whole range of restrictions and control and simply fighting for one small part wouldn't change a thing. One of these women moved off the farm to a larger urban centre where she forged a successful career for herself, while her husband commuted to her and the children during the weekend. Three others confessed to feeling so entrapped that they reached points of despair where they had plans to end their lives. While other isolations and personal needs most likely combine to lead these women to their state of being, issues concerning the extended farming family plays a major role. From these particular women's accounts, it seems clear that a continuity of generations of unfulfilled, unhappy women

reproduces another generation who often have a need to exert power over the next, in order to maintain their sense of place and sense of self.

One of these younger farm wives left the marriage and the farm and moved overseas while the other two sought help. One is in recovery and the other still struggling for resolution. The latter was quite definite that she would never be on the farm if her son married as she would never be that destructive to a daughter-in-law. From her story, it is clear that her husband has the continual and conflicting task of trying to keep both his wife and mother happy. This is an impossible task in this instance, and an unfair imposition on him and both women. Such matriarchal displays seem often maintained, produced and reproduced by the women themselves as they reinforce a sense of importance and empowerment that can wield control and privilege over other women (Mavin, 2006). This is an area that requires more specific and in-depth research.

So, in summary, while Bronwyn demonstrates how extended farming-families can work together for the good of individuals, this success seems rare. Other experiences range from bearable conflict to unbearable struggle. It seems crucial that farm women grow in self-awareness and wisdom and seek their own identity through life, not only in order to sustain their self but also the health of the extended farming family and other relationships. Some farm women, it would seem, are sabotaging other women's lives and the family farm, possibly without realising it. It seems that there could be a direct correlation between the matriarch's sense of personal value and self-esteem and that of their ability to lead and to mentor the next generation. While past generations may have put up with that type of situation, there is growing evidence that young women will not easily remain loyal to a farm, a marriage or an extended farming family to their own detriment. Both 'becoming' and 'belonging', then, while being socially afforded, require agency and intentional transformative action in order to change the situation for the individual.

This next section discusses the power relations of patriarchy (Whatmore, 1991b) which are intrinsically associated to that of matriarchy, with the latter irretrievably influenced by the former. It is these relations which, in both the past and present, mediate how women engage in farming life; they determine how norms and practices about farm-life evolve. By positioning matriarchal and women's power and roles in the shaping of what constitutes a farm wife, patriarchy either facilitates or restrains attempts to negotiate different trajectories of 'becoming'.

## Contributing to patriarchal knowledge

In reference to patriarchal and gender power relations, Fairweather (1995) noted that it is difficult for women marrying onto farms to make farming their career, even if they want to, because it is usually, first and foremost, the husband's farm and his career. Some women in this study tried to cross this divide, as a means of creating a career for themselves on-farm, with quite different outcomes. Louise, through setting up her own work raising calves, developed a confidence in her ability to research new work-knowledge and so she found herself making suggestions about how the farming practice could be improved; but her suggestions were dismissed out of hand. Louise had no support from either the men or women on her farm in attempting to cross the boundary from being a *help* to being a principal-participant in the farming enterprise. She was upsetting the structure and dynamics of the farm by needing to know meanings and needing to contribute to new farming knowledge. She could put her hand to anything, but she wasn't able to take any visible part in the decision-making, although making significant contributions covertly. As Louise recollects:

One year, (one drought), I'd read about this farm where they scanned their ewes and the ones with twin lambs got fed more. They got the best grass and the ones with singles (I mean this was in the early days when they started scanning) - you didn't feed them quite as much. And so I suggested to him 'hey why don't we scan 'because we haven't got much 'tucker' and here are the benefits, here's what we can do'. And I put that idea into his head and a couple of days later he went to his brother and said 'why don't we?' He never said 'oh Louise read this' ... and [never] gave me the benefit of the idea when he suggested it. He just said, 'why don't we scan and that way we can separate the multiple births from the single births and feed them better,' and they did it! They did do it! I was surprised ... A month later I said 'geez that was a great idea wasn't it' and he said 'oh yeah it was' but he would never admit and never probably let on to his father and his brother that the idea came from me. And it did save them – really helped them that year. I mean there were huge benefits. And that was the first year we scanned and the next year we scanned again and it's just part of the routine now especially with the dry conditions, drought, lack of feed and all that. (Louise)

Louise had picked up on what at the time was new technology and new knowledge for them as a family of farmers. Yet, she felt cheated and somewhat de-valued as her suggestion, and her part in this quite critical decision-making, was not acknowledged in any way. She was, in fact, invisible to the process instead of being valued for her contribution. This lack of value seems predicated by the dominance of farm women being restricted to that of farm householder, farm secretary, carer and helper. Louise,

it seems, had overstepped the mark and, seemingly, needed to become invisible in the decision-making or otherwise the whole extended-family ethos needed to be changed. In some ways her needs became a power struggle and an obsession. In effect, she had been unable to 'become', as her perception, of what 'becoming' a farm wife meant, was distinct from that of her new farming family. She came to realise that she didn't 'belong' as is depicted in her predominant use of 'their' and 'they' in talking about the farm, rather than 'us' and 'our'. While, a 'sense of belonging' to the farm and the farming culture requires having knowledge, recognition and acceptance by the local community, these concepts were elusive for Louise within her farming workplace. Her need for self-verification (as she saw herself) (Swann, 1983, 1987; Swann & Read, 1981; Swann, Rentfrow & Guinn, 2002) was radically different than the image being projected by the extended family, which contributed to a sense of alienation.

While this personal account illustrates well the concepts of power, gender, patriarchy and invisibility, many other women described other controlling behaviour. One woman talked of being persistently corrected in front of both casual callers and industry advisors and of being told what to do even when she was already doing it (e.g. preparing food for such callers). Another spoke of "not being allowed" to go to work off-farm as her husband thought "the women [at the hospital] were a bad influence", and others simply not being considered in work arrangements and having to change their personal plans to fit with non-urgent farm plans. By their accounts, the women in this study showed some reticence in speaking of such personal situations, due to some sense of loyalty, privacy and also some feelings of embarrassment regarding their vulnerability. And yet conversely and strangely, they wanted and needed to do so. But, in practice, if they tried to be assertive, they found it almost impossible to put their case to people like farm advisors, bank client-managers, accountants and lawyers, as often their specific knowledge and ability to project their opinion was limited. While some women overcome this position, it seems that being well-informed and having the knowledge and ability to express their selves, is crucial to women exerting a place in the power relations of their particular farm and farming culture. From the cases in this study, this seems more easily achieved within a couple-ownership structure than in an extended-family arrangement.

In summary, these cases establish that knowledge accesses power, which in turn changes the balance of relations. While often the men are described as controlling, dominant and personalising, it seems these behaviours are often

maintained by farm women through accepting subservient roles. Negotiating a change in these power relations, though, is problematic, with particular issues relating to the extended family situation. Challenging such roles can be dis-satisfying, destructive and fragmenting, while crossing boundaries between patriarchal power and matriarchal power seems precarious and potentially destructive for subordinates. Critically, there seems a particularly delicate balance of power between successive generations of women in extended farming families. This almost certainly extends also to power relations between marriage-partners or life-partners. Both power bases, it seems, are problematic. In both situations, as identity is engulfed or submerged, in and by a dominant position, the subordinate 'self' is likely to succumb to the dominating status. This incongruity may result in abandonment or at the very least, neglect of one's authentic 'self' (Adler & Adler, 1989, 1991, 1995; Allan, 1997). It seems clear that in order to 'become' and to 'belong' one needs some sense of knowing, of power, of integration and of valued recognition. Often, it seems there is a trade-off between 'becoming' and seeking other possibilities for 'self' although once one has 'become', it is conceivable that one may then be more able to negotiate other possibilities while still 'belonging'. As Adler and Adler (1991) put it, in a less dominant situation, a role may have *master status* while still enabling other identities to exist. It seems pertinent then, to now look at how a person's history of experiences may contribute to their recognition and ability to exact expectations for their self within such a dominant and traditional culture.

### **'Belonging', 'becoming' and culture - Early days and socialisation through work**

While it is commonly accepted that men identify through their work, it is often suggested that women identify differently, through relationships (Foskey, 2002). This research though challenges that view. Prior to marriage all the farm women participants claimed they had worked at positions they enjoyed. Paid work was an integral part of their identity and sense of self. This changed for many on their farms when paid work was difficult to access. Those who were able to work off-farm found that having a particular role in the community eased acceptance and relegated a specific 'place' to them as newcomer. Several of the women worked for a period after marriage until they were pregnant with their first child. As described previously, Bronwyn worked at a business in the local small rural town. It gave her some sense of

identity as a rural woman and as an immigrant Kiwi (New Zealander). It contributed to her constructing a sense of 'belonging' to the wider culture, the rural district and social community. This work, though, didn't give her the status and empowerment that Anne received by being the local schoolteacher in her district. Anne worked as a teacher at the local rural school for almost three years after her marriage. This position was immensely valued in the community and empowering for her. When the locals knew she was a teacher, doors opened, as the district was desperate for a permanent teacher at the local two-teacher school. As a couple, they were invited for meals and fully included socially.

Such social inclusiveness (or exclusiveness) in social groupings (whether marriage, family or rural community) is fundamental to a sense of belonging or not belonging (Commins, 2004; Shucksmith, 2004). Inclusion allows and encourages free participation and acceptance, while exclusiveness increases isolation. This, then requires independence and agentic action in seeking a place for 'self'. Louise felt excluded from her farming family which resulted in an inability to accommodate her needs into the family farm as a workplace and social practice. Anne, though, felt included in the community when she was teaching. In fact, she assumed a high status. It was a different matter, though, when they shifted to another part of the country after they had their first child and Anne was no longer teaching. There she felt very isolated and alone. Anne summed it up with "it was terrible". She was neither successful in 'becoming' part of this community, nor in constructing a sense of belonging. She never had the access or prestige of the positioning, which she had previously known as the local schoolteacher. Not only was this previous position a sense of personal subjectivity, it was also her identity and status within the community. It resulted in a sense of congruence and empowerment as others verified her known self (Swann et al., 2002). This though never happened in her new community as a young mother and wife. A very different negotiating base was advanced to her by that community and she was forced to negotiate from a weaker, lower-status position.

Sarah also had mixed experiences in negotiating acceptance within farming communities. She described one dairy community in which they farmed, "I hated it there - didn't fit in there at all. Nobody wanted to know (me). They had their cliquey little groups and stuck to them. And so apart from the immediate farm staff, I didn't have anything to do with anybody else ... yeah they were a real tight lot." But when they shifted to another farming district it was different for Sarah. A neighbouring farm

woman, in effect acted as a gatekeeper. She introduced them to the community and as Sarah said, “Just like that (clicks her fingers) – we were in (laughs). Didn’t matter what happened, we fitted in and that was that!” Although Sarah believed that the people were “just more accepting” in this community, it seems that the gatekeeper had the social power to grant them legitimate access. A year or so after leaving this district for just one season, Sarah and her family returned. In the meantime their gatekeeper had moved from the district and the situation was very different. This time they found it very difficult to enter a social grouping. In fact, the social grouping she had previously been part of had disintegrated. Although Sarah tried to rekindle these ‘friendships’ it was to no avail. It seems that this social grouping was reliant on that one person for its very existence. This illustrates the power of cliques, (Adler & Adler, 1995) the dynamics of which may control socialisation through a process of inclusion or exclusion, reproducing social norms and enforcing restrictions. It also demonstrates how leaders may influence, control and wield power over the group either positively or negatively, so there is a real or illusionary mutual connection, the hierarchical structure is dominated by its leader(s) (ibid, 1995). There may be correlations here with matriarchal power, as loyalty, it seems, is a function of identification with one’s leader i.e. group, farm or family leadership. So for Sarah ‘becoming’ and ‘belonging’ was shaped by acceptance and inclusiveness controlled by a gatekeeper. Social inclusiveness is essential to becoming and a sense of belonging. In contrast, social exclusiveness isolates individuals through an exercise of power. This power is not only exercised over newcomers to the culture but can also be an issue for those well-versed with cultural norms.

### ***Identifying through community***

For those who lived as members within close-knit communities, a similar sense of identification and loyalty developed through a range of inclusions and restrictions. Helen’s knowledge of a farm woman’s position came from her early experiences as a farmer’s daughter. However, she noticed a huge change in community culture from her days as a child on an isolated farm to her present day position as a farm wife. While less isolated geographically, in many ways she assumes a more isolated position. As a child her life was anchored in a tight-knit community. Helen felt she ‘belonged’ almost to an extended family. However, the rural community she lives in

now is very different. Since the rural downturn, during the late 1980s, there has been amalgamation of smaller farms and married couples, who traditionally worked on larger farms and occupied additional farm houses, have given way to lifestylers who work in town while occupying houses surveyed off with small blocks of land. The previous experience of social inclusiveness and community has all but died away. Over the last twenty-five years or so, it seems that political and financial policies have dictated a more individualised style of farming with more exclusive communities, which all add to the loss of collective identity and loss of sense of belonging. The mythical sense of the rural idyll and lifestyle is now at best, elusive.

In summary, inclusiveness in social groupings is fundamental to a sense of belonging (Commins, 2004; Shucksmith, 2004). This allows and encourages free participation and acceptance, albeit within the boundaries of the dominant players. Exclusiveness increases isolation by disabling an ability to accommodate. This results in a lack of position and status resulting in a sense of alienation, which then requires independence and agentic action in seeking a new place for 'self'. This is further examined in the next section, in considering how urban in-migrants may differ from farm-daughters in their process of 'becoming' and 'belonging' in their new farming cultures.

### **Sense of belonging: social inclusiveness or exclusiveness**

A sense of belonging is predicated by one's knowledge about that, which one is seeking to belong (Hall, 1995; Suvin, 2005). As a farm daughter, Helen had a definite image and knowledge of her new work as a farm wife and was enthusiastic about the prospect. In contrast, Kate also a farm-daughter, while having knowledge of what would be required of her, was reluctant to accommodate these roles, which meant she struggled to 'become' and to 'belong'. Of the nine case studies, eight expressed struggles with belonging. This tension was also strongly supported by other women in the field. As with Sarah's case particular districts seemed to be more difficult to penetrate, although for some it was more general. Only Helen and Bronwyn seemed to have more seamless or less problematic passages in becoming and belonging; Helen due to her sociocultural knowledge and Bronwyn due to her acceptance of her role within her new extended family. This was scaffolded to a large extent by her mother-in-law's liberal view of a farm-woman's place. Others, though, needed to

learn the rituals and to acknowledge artifactual and sociocultural history as local knowledge. For many of these women it meant learning domestication and how to cook for large numbers of men while being available and willing to help outside when needed. It often required trading-off the 'self' as it was previously known. This 'helping' needed to be prefaced by learning *how* and *about* farming practice to the level of appropriation. As a city entrant to farming life, through marriage, I draw on my early experiences as a young farm wife to show how this knowledge or lack of it may impact on a newcomer.

### ***The chocolate cake experience***

Memories of my early days of getting to know the local women, consist of conversations about issues related to domestication, helping, knowing what one should do and how to do it. The younger women, at that time, would talk about how they coped with cooking for shearers, how much food they gave them and what sort. They shared stories about how they were developing their gardens, how to preserve fruit from their orchards and how to have a continuous supply of vegetables in their gardens. If you could cope with these tasks well, you grew in stature. There was a pride in how well women looked after 'their men' and their children. Contributing to community events, either by 'arranging the hall' or being on an organising committee or by providing food, was an expectation which once again gave one status if one was successful and effective.

I recall in my first few months as a farm wife, being asked to contribute a chocolate cake to the District Sheepdog Trials. This is a ritual where the men (occasionally women more latterly but not then) run their dogs over a course, herding or driving sheep in a competitive mode, according to specific rules. The women supply, prepare, cook and present the food to the men for smokos and dinner at midday. As a new wife and not knowing the rituals or the rules, I agreed to make a chocolate cake as requested and proceeded to do so. On the day in question, my new husband took my cake around to the dog trials and presented it to the women. He duly went off to do his work on the course. Later I went around to the course thinking that I may learn how to run a young sheepdog that I had been training for myself. I was met by a woman who said she thought I should know that they (i.e. the women) had discussed my cake and had decided it wasn't good enough for the men, so it wasn't

put out. I was stunned, upset, confused and very perplexed. I sought out my young husband and asked him what was wrong with my chocolate cake. Of course he had no idea because it wasn't at all important to him what a cake looked like.

Over time, I came to realise that I had made the 'wrong' type of chocolate cake. Coming from a suburban city background I had made the sort of cake that my mother made. For her, making a cake was an economic decision. She made it in a large square tin, which made the cake go further. In contrast a rural chocolate cake (of the time) was high and round with raspberry jam and cream in the middle. It was a clash of cultures. My cake was a 'state-housing' economic production not at all suitable for the men in this farming community, or so the matriarchal women decided. They exercised their status and power in rejecting my 'inferior' contribution. My response to this experience was that I never again contributed another cake to the dog trials, even though over the years I became a more than acceptable cook and baker, in true rural mode. While others in a similar predicament might have gone away and learned how to make the best darn cake for the next year, I felt my known culture and my mother and my very self had been rejected and as a result, my response was to reject the dog trials or at least the women's role in this organisation. My independent self came to the fore and was more important to me than being part of that particular collective. Of course I did take part in many other similar events but by rejecting this particular part of the culture I felt I was maintaining a part of myself that was vital to whom I was at that time. It was, though, an exclusive and exclusionary action and a further source of isolation.

### ***Born to the job – a different burden***

In contrast, Helen would never have had that experience because she had been doing this work since she was a young girl. She has always felt a strong sense of belonging to the farming community due to her capable, hardy and clear influences of her farming-family upbringing. While I had to work over many years to become an authentic member of the rural culture, she had grown up with this identity and capability. There wasn't a lot that she had to learn, as it was a progression from her childhood in many ways. As Helen herself said, "pathetic when you think about it – I was never a kid was I?" She had a strong role-model in her mother whom she clearly adored and admired and who guided her through an intensive apprenticeship

involving cooking for men, baking, preserving and gardening. She carried these onto her early days as a farm wife while also involved helping outside on the farm where she would spend “half [her] day” with children in tow and putting her hand to most farming work. Helen, initially at least, seemed to have a smooth transition into her role as a farm wife due in no small measure to her prolonged immersion in the culture as a child. She was though to find further into her life that struggles of transition are difficult to avoid. This is discussed in subsequent chapters addressing sustaining and transforming one’s self.

### **Conclusion: Becoming a farmer’s wife - contestation, subjugation and resistance**

In conclusion, this chapter has identified experiences of becoming a farm wife and distinct journeys to belonging and enjoying a sense of self in that role. It found that, farm women (wives) enter into the farm-marriage initially through an emotional bond, i.e. they get married. In doing so, they not only marry a farmer but also a farm and often an extended farming family. ‘Becoming’ a farm(er’s) wife entails learning what to do, how to do it and how to be. The data shows that while seeming to willingly ‘be’-come, in reality these women are often ‘over’-come by pressures of the farming culture and their desire to please and to be useful. With some willingness but at times in spite of their ‘self’, these women describe a total immersion in the farm and in their husband’s career and life. Often, it seems there is a trade-off between ‘becoming’ and seeking other possibilities for ‘self’. Once one has ‘become’ though, it is conceivable that one may then be more able to negotiate other possibilities while still ‘belonging’. That is, a role may have *master status* while still enabling other identities to exist (Adler & Adler, 1991). This often seems difficult to achieve and requires a special strength of ‘self’. It requires working through a range of potentially debilitating isolations. It commands an independent attitude and set of abilities, in what is perceived as an interdependent culture. This interdependency seems to burden the women more than the men. As one woman said, “It’s alright for the men; they go from a mother to a wife.”

It seems that a sense of belonging may rely on to what degree one is prepared to “buy into” (Wertsch, 1998, p.55) the expected norms and behaviours. Choice is relative and may range from that of fully embracing the culture, competencies and skills, to strongly resisting. It seems clear that in order to ‘become’ and to ‘belong’

one needs some sense of knowing, of power, of integration and of valued recognition. This, in itself, seems to sabotage the women's sense of self and some younger farm women are actively resisting being suitably informed. In others, as Wertsch (*ibid*) theorises, mastery may be high and yet covert resistance and dissimulation or pretence, may cloud a low level of appropriation. In these cases the work and life choices lack personal intentionality or 'putting one's own stamp on it'. This misappropriation then is manifested in lack of true identity and lack of authenticity. In the women studied, this incongruity and fragmentation often presents itself as depressive symptoms and, at times, despair.

It seems from these women's accounts that they often 'become' farm wives in spite of their selves, not from choice but from social expectations and command within a dominant patriarchal system. A critical essence of this system consists of an intense and persistent interplay between gender relations and power relations (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987, 2002, 2005). Women, often unwittingly, have sustained and reproduced these dominant relations by either 'free' or reluctant participation in the culture as it is known. Negotiating a change in these power relations, though, is problematic as challenging such situations can be destructive and fragmenting.

The findings here highlight a delicate balance of power between successive generations of farm women, particularly in extended farming families. This almost certainly extends to power relations between marriage or life partners. Crossing boundaries between patriarchal power and matriarchal power seems precarious as both power bases are destructive for subordinates. Both, it seems, are problematic, as, with the engulfment of identity, the subordinate 'self' succumbs to the dominating status. This incongruity may result in abandonment or at the very least, neglect of one's authentic 'self' (Adler & Adler, 1991).

Further, dependencies and isolations, which have continuity throughout the lives of farm women relegate 'becoming' to 'denying self'. Challenging these socially-accepted norms and deeply embedded traditions requires developing negotiating skills in order to claim a position that lessens such vulnerabilities, which seem to deny recognition of a woman's needs for 'self'. The chapter has revealed a glimpse of possibilities for change, if farm women came to support each other in a genuine way; with confidence and trust. But this, it seems, is rare and appears not to be able to sustain itself. Cultural expectations, needs and norms seem to favour divide

and rule thereby furnishing farm women's lack of solidarity. From these particular women's accounts, it seems clear that a continuity of generations of unfulfilled women living lives within personal voids reproduces another generation who often have a need to exert power over the next, in order to maintain their sense of place and sense of self. However, through attitudinal changes the sustainability of the expected 'loyalty' and subservient commitment of women to farm, husband and family is challenged. These cases establish that knowledge accesses power, which in turn changes the balance of relations. It seems pertinent then to consider how a person's history of experiences may contribute to their self-recognition and ability to exact expectations for their self within such a dominant and traditional culture. There is evidence here that resistance to 'consummate-participation' is gaining traction as women acknowledge a need of choice for their 'self'. The following two data chapters (Chapters 7 and 8) analyse narratives of the participating women towards isolating the extent to which individuals resist or accommodate, have "fragile identities" or are vulnerable to "identity regulation" (Coupland 2003, p.7) in their pursuit of personal maintenance and transformative selves. Chapter 7 specifically seeks to unravel how farm women maintain their 'self' within their roles as farm wives and how this challenges the maintenance and sustainability of farming culture as we know it.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MAINTAINING ‘SELF’ AND MAINTAINING CULTURE WITHIN MARRIAGE, FAMILY, WORK-ROLES AND COMMUNITY

*And once subjectivity is recognized as something “under construction” it also becomes possible to ponder upon different shapes of selfhood and of relations to the world, that is, it becomes possible to get a feeling for alternatives (Slunecko & Hengl, 2007, p. 58)*

This chapter describes, elaborates and draws conclusions about the process of maintaining ‘self’ throughout a life of being a farm wife. It argues that the relationships between maintaining self and maintaining culture within marriage, family, work-roles and community, stood as a challenge for the participating farm women, and were quite deleterious for some of them. While maintenance seems to infer a period of conservation, one of continuity or even enduring existence, it was found here to be a time of preservation and of repair and upkeep, requiring support and affordances that were not always forthcoming. This period of preservation requires upholding and defending one’s ‘self’ against contradiction, rather than simply capitulating to a default position that merely subsists rather than cultivates. To be fully alive needs some periods of personal challenge that are energising. But the narratives from the farm women identified relationships between maintaining selves and culture as complex and contested.

#### **Farm women’s maintenance of self**

As noted in the previous chapter, the process of becoming a ‘farmer’s wife’ and maintaining the ‘self’ on the farm often masks a time of struggle, conflict and hidden turmoil. Becoming is a complex process that requires accommodating multiple realities, multiple layers and perceptions. In considering the process of maintaining the self through life as a farm wife, I initially thought this would have been realised through choosing various paths of self-development. However, for the women engaged in the study it was not that straightforward. Instead, these women reported struggling to maintain their ‘selves’, with many living unsustainable lives. It is as if

they were trapped by what many saw as their 'own choice' although in reality they were often enmeshed in cultural and social impositions. This form of entrapment was often found to result in an exclusion of their personal aspirations, and it arose in ways that made it difficult for them to see other or alternative possibilities. Over time, it was found that many seemed to lose confidence and it became difficult for them to reinvent themselves. This chapter elaborates these findings and draws conclusions from them about how these women maintain their 'self' within their specific culture. Through a synthesis of their individual successes and difficulties, it proposes new understandings about how these might affect the maintenance of farming culture in New Zealand. A strong theme of entrapment emerges throughout the analysis, with some women persisting in mere containment. Others though, have sought freedom of self, often through tense decisions that commonly required challenging periods of conflict and struggle. It is the analysis of these efforts at maintenance of self that are developed throughout this chapter.

### **Integrating work, life and identity**

A key challenge for farm women is to negotiate an integration of work, life and identity often within the environs of a social structure not of their personal career choice, but rather imposed upon them through marriage. The labels for these women as helpers and sounding boards, along with the associated sense of disempowerment that these terms allude to and carry, are not easy for them to accept over a lengthy farm life. On the surface, it may seem that some women 'only' want to fulfil a supporting role on-farm. Yet, in talking to such women this was found not to be the case. In these women's accounts, the problem is not so much that farm women resent some helping and supporting of their husbands' aspirations. Instead, it is how they have become embedded in that role. In reality and against common perceptions, they do not become equal partners over time with equal power and equal responsibilities. But even more central here is that farming is usually not their choice of career and so their interest level in this imposed work is not as passionate and fulfilling as it may be for their husbands. As the initial interest in farm life recedes, the assumed career begins to lack legitimacy as these women are found to often quietly and covertly, yearn for something more. They describe an unknown root of emptiness and confusion often accompanied by a sense of guilt. Why can they not feel happy and

fulfilled with this perceived idyllic life? The men, similarly, are perplexed also as to why their wife “can’t be happy with such a good life” because they perceive all other women are coping fine. This confusion and major source of conflict is heightened by cultural expectations, fiercely-protected privacy and family loyalty. However, the research suggests that there are clear generational differences, with each cohort presenting distinct patterns as the women attempt to cope with the adjustments and the disequilibria often imposed by their life-choice of marriage. What then are the ways farm women are able to negotiate their sense of self? And how do historical and cultural expectations impact on their perception of ‘choice’?

### *Historical expectations versus reality*

Understandings about farm women are steeped in rich sociohistoric aspects of N.Z. farming culture, as are expectations about their roles being life-long. Farming in New Zealand has a strong history of the hardworking, domesticated and resourceful woman ‘standing by her man’ and supporting him in his work (e.g. Belich, 2001; Park, 1991; WDFFNZ, circa 1957), thereby emphasising the ongoing role of maintenance of both his self and the farm. It might be expected that this attitude has been subject to change, and that women would now be valued more comprehensively and overtly. But this does not appear to be the case according to these women’s accounts. Earlier research (Allan, 2005a) secured insights into what can happen when a farmer’s son farms because of family expectations, out of loyalty or as an easy option. It found that a lack of purpose, ownership, freedom and personal choice in their farming career could limit a farmer’s ability to innovate and succeed, especially in times of adversity. This finding prompted the need to understand the circumstances for farm women who farm as a result of marrying a farmer; who over time come to experience the often burdensome impositions associated with farming-life. This current investigation, of farm women and their changing senses of self, depicts farming culture and its expectations as difficult to challenge, which many of the participants have found to their detriment.

The findings here, concerning the hard-fought trajectories towards personal transformations of participating women, are confronting and disturbing; even for someone like me who has been in farming a long time. I have been quite shocked by the amount of depression and unhappiness that has emerged from the women’s

stories. Some are aggressive and angry, “I told him, ‘if you want to feed them you do it yourself, I’m going out and finding a life for myself’”, while others are more submissive. Yet, there is a yearning for their stories to be told. “Fascinating” is the word most commonly used by farm women who ask about my study, although they may not want to say it too loudly or openly. Moreover, they are interested and pleased to learn that ‘their’ story, or that of their mother, is not isolated and that their reality is being given a voice.

The following ethnographies illustrate the struggles that participating farm women have faced in maintaining their ‘selves’ within their farm-marriages. Their lives changed immeasurably through marrying a farmer, his farming enterprise and often an extended farming family. From here, the process of maintaining self is reported to comprise a complicated entanglement between social and individual imperatives. The influences on this entanglement include, but are not exclusive to: (i) being urban or rural-raised, (ii) the level and type of education and training, (iii) self-confidence in personal and inter-personal skills, as well as (iv) gender and power relations within the farm-marriage, farming enterprise and community. A major division, boldly exhibited is the intergenerational difference in expectations and attitudes of farm women. A base for maintenance of self, within an often dominating, isolating and unforgiving culture, is identified as being realised through negotiation, choice, entrapment and the exercise of personal agency. Through their lives as farm wives, points of resistance and accommodation in the concepts of identity regulation and entrapment are exercised. How this, then, challenges the maintenance and sustainability of farming culture as we know it is a critical question.

### **Ethnographies of maintaining self and culture**

For a newcomer in an adopted culture, conflict between maintaining oneself while continuing to learn about and to claim the culture as one’s own, is found to be challenging (Hall, 1995; Lave, 2001). Farming culture with its strongly traditional sets of norms and expectations, set in a complicated mix of interdependence and self-reliance, is difficult to navigate. This is particularly due to the cultural reality where personal and social challenges and intrapersonal pressures are kept hidden, unvoiced and private. These expectations further isolate women who then presume it is “just me” or that it is their problem. Navigating this adopted landscape often loses direction

without guidance from other farm women who are more experienced. The men, it seems, don't understand the issues as their world is different. In fact, this world is, more accurately, *their* world in which many women live somewhat as aliens. This chapter uses ethnographies of the lives of participating women as examples of means and processes of dealing with issues of self faced through marriage to a farmer. An early issue is one of leaving behind their known career and with that, their identity and known self. For many this is an issue during time of maintenance as the reality of an extended life in farming competes with difficulties of accessing and following careers that fully utilise and challenge their skills and abilities.

### **Identifying through career, work or relationships**

Some consider that farm men identify through their work and yet farm women identify differently through their relationships (Foskey, 2002). However, this notion is challenged within this study. Participating women strongly identify through their work and accompanying positions, which are often not challenging or satisfying and not their career of choice. Traditionally women who married farmers have often been qualified nurses, teachers, physiotherapists and other professionals with many of the participating women coming from such backgrounds. Those who married in the 1970s and 1980s, typically, never questioned the need to 'give up' their career. This was just what one did when marrying a farmer. None the less, the women commonly speak of how they loved their chosen careers as single women. In some instances, these careers continued into the early days of marriage. Helen, typically, reflected on her early career as work she "loved" and that "excited" her. So, her professional life away from the farm was important for her, and something close to her sense of self. Yet, although Helen lived near a school and had opportunities to continue her teaching career, the culture of New Zealand farming and the entangled busy life seemed to limit her. The making of such decisions is often entangled in a biased set of economic considerations i.e. what is considered a good economic decision for the farm not necessarily that of the person (wife). Helen had thought over the years of going back to her career but she was convinced "it was never going to be economic" for her.

This economic argument is one that is often mooted by the participants for adhering to traditional farming life, even though it might go against their sense of self. I myself have reflected on this argument over the years. Initially, working off-farm

was just not considered, because “it didn’t pay”. No one questioned this statement. It just seemed to be ‘known’ (local knowledge) that it didn’t pay. In Helen’s situation it would be difficult to believe that it wouldn’t be financially viable as she lived a few minutes travel from her nearest school. Prior to changes in the later 1980s, though, even a short working commute was thought extraordinary, bearing in mind that the cultural norm of the day was that one only went to town for supplies every few weeks and to the nearest provincial town only in exceptional circumstances.

In recognition of such illogic, a male farmer said to me recently that his wife had wanted to return to her nursing career for years but he had persistently stated that it just wouldn’t pay with the travel and other costs. On hearing of my research outcomes, he expressed some sense of guilt about not facilitating or accommodating her longings because, in truth, it was merely farming convenience and cultural norms and expectations that argued his point. This ‘not paying’ seems to be an argument that is based as much on historical factors and patriarchal argument as any other reasoning. In reality, the woman is often needed on-farm for her other roles of feeding the men, maintaining the farm household and helping on the farm. Often she is the glue that holds the family and farm together. This farmer concluded though, that his wife is now playing golf (which she is very good at) and that is fulfilling her needs. Such activities are often taken up by default and as a means of filling in time and keeping the woman occupied. After all, golf, gardening and other activities can be fitted in around farming needs and seasonal work. Helen, though, more accurately describes default activities as “filling in time”. She says she doesn’t play golf as, “I’ve never been one who can’t find things to do – if there’s nothing to do I can always clean out the garage (laughs).” Cleaning out the garage it seems is a more valid time-filler than golf, as it is a legitimate form of work rather than recreation.

Helen does, though, recognise the burden of the third shift where, if she returned to teaching, she would be working (1) at home (i.e. farm household), (2) on-farm (i.e. outside farmwork) and (3) at her school position. She has observed this situation in other women but has avoided finding a solution for her ‘self’, by negating the option on economic grounds. Over the years, she has succumbed to the underutilisation of her knowledge, skills and abilities while busying her self with servile less-skilled work. It is pertinent here also to acknowledge her expression, that she was a “kept woman”, indicating that she doubted her absolute or genuine value to the farm household and business. So, while justifying her ‘decision’ largely through

economics, it is in fact a position assumed predominantly due to loss of professional confidence. This sense of inadequacy, described by numerous participants, seems sustained by lack of practice, after being away from their chosen careers for a number of years. One woman who had been a nurse in charge of a ward at a busy hospital confided that after seven years “not working” she didn’t have the confidence to even accept a job as a registered nurse at the local rest-home (i.e. a much less pressured position), as she felt too anxious about doing this work. This loss of confidence seems to be established through working at roles that, while busy, are not challenging, but also through social and professional isolation.

Many women have over time become trapped in no-man’s land, a ‘place’ that Lave (2001) identifies as problematic for in-migrants struggling ‘to become’ in a new culture. Even partial accommodation culminates in a position where “they cannot *go home*” as “they *are* at home” (ibid., p. 305) and that, in some ways, those who “stay on” are diasporic (Hall, 1995) or displaced. For those women who do ‘become’, this transitory identity dominates over time, mimicing maintenance of self. Evidence from these women’s lives though, suggests that such identity is often less than authentic and requires transformative experiences to become subjective and connected. This accommodation culminates in a ‘loss’ of place, illustrating a growing surge of entrapment, not readily recognised or challenged by the women.

### **Identifying through children – children as a career**

Due to geographical and other restraints children typically, then, become women’s newly ‘chosen’ career, which also becomes central to their maintenance of self in a farming community. So, while the women participants have previously identified through their professional work and status, they commonly come to identify through their childbearing and childrearing responsibilities: their children, effectively, become their career along with other farming entanglements. Traditionally, in rural communities, reproducing the next generation has had both a productive and reproductive role and position in sustaining the family farm. As such, families are inclined to be larger and often closer in age than urban families. The genderised, social, intellectual, professional and emotional isolations included in such circumstances, though, are often acute.

As a young farm wife, I left not only my career behind in the city but also all my friends who were an intrinsic part of my identity and my very 'self'. While in my naiveté I thought new friends would replace them, this proved to be more difficult than I presumed. However, the sense of value and importance, that I had as a nurse, followed me, to some degree, to the country where I was accorded some status and prestige. Those who were nurses were thought to be a bit special and to have some special knowledge. After all, we dealt with people at their most vulnerable and often darkest moments and saved lives didn't we? Well, that was the perception. Nurses were seen to be 'good farmer's wives' as we were known to be good workers who would turn our hands to most things and not be perturbed about getting our hands dirty. Regularly, over the years I have been called on to advise people with their health needs, to attend car and other accidents and in mental health crises. In more than one serious situation, I was sought to approach and negotiate with a farmer who was behaving erratically and who was threatening self-harm. While a similar privileged status seems to be reserved for those from teaching and other professional backgrounds, there is something a little special about the admiration granted those from the medical profession, albeit in a way that is culturally convenient. It seems on reflection though, that this professional, non-farm knowledge is recognised and privileged, in order to provide essential care within the limitations of the community; while not easily extending these privileges to positions of power and equality within the farming practice and culture.

The reality as a young farm wife, though, must have been very clear to me, because well before marriage and my relocation to the rural scene, I consciously made the decision to have a number of children close together. This desire to have a relatively large family by modern standards (five children in total) was also a means of creating a career for my 'self', within my geographical and marital boundaries. I vividly recall having the conversations with my new husband about what I would or could do with my life now that I was living in a specific geographically-located situation; at that time, very much restricted by social and cultural expectations related to being a 'farm wife'. But as the years went by and my knowledge of farming grew I assumed the helping role as it fitted in with my mothering responsibilities. The children always came first though. Of course, there was always the food to be prepared, the men to be fed, shearers to be provided for and a myriad of tasks. Like Rachel (the young farm woman raised in a rural town and now strongly resisting on-

farm involvement while living in a remote valley) I moaned and groaned quite a bit about feeding shearers and the like, especially when I had a new baby or sick child or similar. However, over time I 'became' a very good and useful farm wife who in the event of accidents or illness could assume responsibility for most farmwork. By far, my most overwhelming memory of these very busy early days is that of satisfaction and mostly of pleasure. Yet, there were days that I know I thought, and even verbalised, that there must be more to life than this, always being tired and worn out. This state was no doubt a result of mothering four children under five years old but also included the range of isolations, the 24/7 nature of farming responsibilities and the lack of options due to the entangling of the farm-household, farmwork and family with limited financial resources. As the children grew up and were able to help on the farm, like most farm families, they and I assumed more farm responsibility although still heavily inclined towards the more routine tasks.

Helen likewise, described her days of mothering with some pride, but with a degree of doubt of her own enrichment. It was something she saw that she did for her husband. As she said somewhat wistfully, "You've got to think that having children enriched your life and it does in a way, but having children ... Oh, it was the most wonderful thing I ever did to provide my husband with [five] babies and I was always a very happy mother [but] not so much now." She went on to describe her lack of satisfaction as a parent of teenagers and young adults with whom she has a difficult relationship. Helen no longer really believes she is needed and feels "used" and at times "abused" as she maintains her caring roles of feeding and upholding the family when they are home. Her years of mothering, selflessness and devotion are now being questioned. Should she have cared more for her 'self' and her own interests? Helen's description of "providing [her] husband with babies" is interesting. It's almost like she had the babies for her husband and not for herself, even though she thinks she was "clucky" and enjoyed mothering. It may be telling, that she "felt needed", that it gave her a sense of place and importance, bolstered also by the knowledge that she was sustaining the farm-family. It seems, though, from her narrative that she has not found mothering on its own, sustainable or particularly fulfilling, for her self. As her children have grown in independence and seem to no longer need her or accept her authority, she still assumes the role of "doing all the washing", while attempting to maintain her known role, that of mother. But her sense of self and role in the family are threatened and her care of 'self' over the years is doubtful.

Helen is typical of the mothers in this study with her commitment to her children's upbringing. The women consistently expressed the feeling that they were always running a child somewhere or the other. And, without exception, those participants with older children have raised very successful and well-educated offspring with many notable high achievers. It seems these women through devoting themselves to their parenting roles have been very successful in producing a very creditable generation of young people but often to the detriment of their own needs and sense of wellness. Achieving this requires a resilience and resourcefulness as they commit themselves to their families, their farm and their husband's aspirations. Initially, at least, there was little questioning of this selflessness indicating possibly an unassumed entrapment as women were consumed by these demanding roles.

So, while the nine participating farm women almost invariably used childbearing and rearing as an early component of farm life career, along with the role of farm-wife, there seems a critical need to avoid engulfing one's self in that role of mothering. If the question of 'what to do next' is not faced and the woman keeps identifying almost solely through her children eventually the issues that were somewhat ignored, resurface. It seems this role is not sustainable and culminates in an alienation of 'self' which challenges her ability to maintain self. Transformative action may then result from a build-up of dis-satisfaction or even resentment as the children leave home and lead their own lives. Many women merge the cessation of this stage with that of helping on the farm which raises other pertinent issues.

Farm work itself, while often consisting of filling in when and where needed, is also a tie that willingly or otherwise confines these women progressively as the children become more mobile. Often, the women and children assume inherent roles of farm workers, although seeming to merely act as helpers or doing what is expected of one in farming families. It seems that prolonged periods of 'children as careers' and that of working outside on the farm have common issues. In both, individual thought is required to mediate between habit and repression or liberation of subjectivity through questioning and thereby making the decision agentic and consensual (Ransom, 1997). Such agency is critical to self-maintenance and transformation rather than simply maintaining the cultural status quo. The next section considers the roles and experiences of some participants as essential labour in outside farmwork and its place in the entanglement of work, self, family and culture.

### **Working outside on the farm – partial participation**

Although women's work on the farm is essential, it is not readily recognised as such, even by them. It has traditionally been seen as the norm, although this view is increasingly being challenged by the new generation of farm women. Most farm women recount vivid memories of farm work; firstly taking infants and toddlers with them and progressing to working as a family when the children got a little older. In this way, most of them had, at least at times, sought to maintain themselves in new roles through engaging in work on the farm, but outside the farm house.

Anne became fully involved on-farm when she had a five year old, a four year old and a baby just a few months old. They “scraped up everything” that they could, “to buy their first farm” but needed to supplement their farm income. So, the husband (Jim) went out shearing and Anne “had to work the farm”, which consisted mainly of sheep and pigs. Her memories were that she used to “love the pigs” and “did most of the lambing and all that” and while she hated the inevitable end of the sale of the pigs and lambs, she “loved the work”. Although as a trained teacher she could have earned good money, she “didn't think of going *out* to work because Jim was more capable of going out and shearing or mustering and he enjoyed that.” So, while working hard physically at farmwork, concurrently with caring for small children, Anne acknowledged her husband's needs and enjoyment of off-farm work and was pleased to play her part in the establishment of their farm. She did, though, seem to be assuming more than her share of the total workload although this appeared to go almost unnoticed by her. But although Anne was more than capable of doing the practical work, she had limited management knowledge so Jim was the major decision-maker. While she described doing almost all the farm work, with children in tow, “Jim was certainly the boss... he used to tell me, sort of what to do because it seemed to be [more] natural for him.”

Although she was not involved in the major decision making, Anne was very busy completing work essential to the success of their business. She was obviously very capable of completing tasks associated with the day to day running of the farm, which couldn't have carried on easily without her. Although she was doing the more routine work that is generally considered less skilled, she felt like she had an important role. She saw herself as being in partnership rather than merely helping. However, this partnership in reality was unequal as, besides all the farm work, the

household and childcare work fell upon Anne's shoulders because Jim was not at all domesticated. But this inequality eluded Anne as she said: "I felt I was a partner in the [farm] yes, really, yes. We shared – like he would never do anything like dishes or anything. I would never expect him to cook a meal or anything in those days because he was so busy with his own [work] – with the farm work and I mean he would never change a nap or whatever ...” While Anne freely acknowledged her husband's workload and his enjoyment of social contact, she minimalised her own workload and disowned any needs for herself. She was carrying more than her share of the farm work while assuming almost full responsibility for the children and the farm household. The absence of holidays was not challenged either as “you didn't, because I mean, there was always stock to feed and it was always hard to get away and Jim had so many [working] dogs, he loved his dogs and ... you know it wasn't easy to get away.”

Critically, Anne described how Jim made all the major decisions and did all the bookwork. This meant that she remained in ignorance of this level of farm and financial management. So when she was widowed as a relatively young woman, she was faced with a series of problems for which she had little knowledge or experience. While she saw herself quite definitely as a partner, she was almost blind to the fact that she was participating at a level of partial participation (Lave, 1991), which could be described as manipulative (Pretty, 1995). Through participating in this way, she lacked the knowledge and experience to easily assume the responsibility for management of the farm when her husband died young. She fell into the trap for which successful farmers need to constantly monitor i.e. working *hard* but not so *smart* (Allan 2005a). At the same time, Anne was neglecting to maintain her 'self', which resulted in a lack of confidence, lack of personal direction and lack of personal empowerment, which manifested itself in her lack of self-reliance to easily take over the farm.

From these accounts, it is clear that there is more to working outside on the farm than merely helping. It declares issues of gender, power and perceptions of knowledge while revealing knowledge, or the lack of it, as a factor in understanding power relations. While Anne had a good working knowledge of the more routine aspects of farming, she seemed lacking in the particular expert knowledge and dispositional ability (Allan, 2005a) that empowers one's 'self' to manage the farm. Higher-level knowledge places one in a dominant position for negotiating and for full

membership of the work practice. The more routine procedural knowledge, though, seems in reality to contain women like Anne, in the supporting role. This effects the positioning of women in particular ways that disempower them through unequal value and standing. It is clear that these farm women's participation is often manipulative and cast in a series of inequalities and entrapments, fuelled in part by their initial enthusiasm and willingness to please and be useful. These inequalities then build gender and power relations in favour of the men. Degree of participation and decision making is seen as a critical component of steerage of this imposed authority and lack of empowerment. For extended periods of farm work to provide a basis for maintenance of self, there needs to be a degree of personal choice based on desire and need for self rather than issues of subjugation and coercion. It reflects the claim that "maturity cannot be achieved until individuals develop a complex relationship to the self ..." (Ransom, 1997, p. 75). The relationship requires questioning possibilities through exercising thought rather than blind acceptance. The critical place of elements of power and gender in truncating personal growth and maintenance are further developed in the next section.

### **Decision-making: issues of power and knowledge**

An essential component of power in farming relationships is based on decision-making and the degree to which both parties are informed enough to make decisions. Some women, though, actively resist becoming informed, seemingly in an attempt to avoid any entanglement in the working lives of their chosen partners. As one woman (Sue) said, "It's his farm; it's nothing to do with me. I make no claim to contributing in any way to the farm. I live my own life." While she was declaring quite aggressively that she didn't want anything to do with the farm and that she had her own life, she described issues with being trapped on a farm and having limited choice. Even though this woman projects an assertive image it seems she has underlying issues of entrapment and dis-satisfaction. Rachel, likewise, asserted that she didn't want to be informed. Yet, she too depicted many issues of being entrapped by loss of career, unequal division of labour and lack of choice in her geographical and social isolation. While both these women (like others) are resisting quite strongly, the effectiveness of their resistance for their 'self' is far from clear. It seems that Sue has been resisting for thirty years and yet this indicates a lack of resolution.

While resistance is gaining traction with younger farm women, it is still perhaps less common than some form of capitulation. Resistance in itself, though, without resolution, may be as problematic as it could be seen as yielding. Once again these differences highlight the need for effective transformation nourished and anchored by self-maintenance or otherwise entrapment remains deep-seated and intractable, even within a resistant attitude.

### **Careers - childcare, farmwork and helping but is it empowering?**

In sum, as newcomers, then, to their adopted culture, the farm women often manage their individual senses of 'self' through replacing their chosen professions, careers or work with that of mothering, wifehood, community involvement and farm help. Many women are intrinsic to the success of the farm and farm household as they are the glue that holds it all together; they act as a reserve army fitting in where needed. However, even those fully committed to playing their part in the viability of the farm, in reality, play a supportive role with little involvement in management and organisational decision making. By working hard in their limited positions they are in effect sustaining their lack of empowerment, which in turn causes conflict between maintaining their 'self', while continuing to learn about and to claim the culture as their own. Although there is a growing cultural resistance to such positioning, (among younger women for instance), challenging farming culture with its strongly traditional sets of norms and expectations set in a complicated mix of interdependence and self-reliance, is a difficult course to navigate.

### **Resistance or capitulation: self-maintenance or self-preservation**

Negotiating a role for themselves on farms takes different forms for these women. Not all want to be a key component or equal partner in the farm and business decision-making. However, the resentment amongst these women is strong when they make a deliberate effort to go beyond being a helper and play informed and active roles on the farm only to continue to be seen as a help-mate. As described, helping and supporting while acting as a sounding board is not only a fulfilment of cultural expectations, but is an intrinsic component of cultural-maintenance (Allan, 2006, 2005a). Such acknowledgement is clear as many women in this research used these terms to describe themselves and their 'place' in their farming partnership. Panelli and

Gallagher (2003) observed this phenomenon in New Zealand vegetable producers' wives. These hard-working wives, worked long hours in the fields alongside their husbands. They did essential physical work, yet invariably described their contribution as helping, reinforcing unequal gender roles and unequal value. These patriarchal relations and unequal gender and power relations furnish how farm women's work is valued and particularly how they are positioned in decision-making. This inequality seems almost unnoticed by some women as Anne depicts in her story (above) and yet, she later acknowledged understanding "exactly, why younger women don't want to live this life". But they often continue to do the more repetitive, routine work, helping when and as needed, all the same, while playing more minor roles in major decisions.

It seems that even those women, who actively work at being involved in farm management decisions, are "knocked back". Many find participation in the decision-making process personally challenging, as they feel their knowledge and opinion is often dismissed or received as lacking authority or legitimacy. As one said, with exasperation and sarcasm, after seeming to be dismissed in a farm management meeting, "what do *I* know? I've only been farming for thirty years!" Others, though, like Bronwyn, through constructing a high level of knowledge and playing a major role in financial and management decision-making, may in fact have forged a more equal partnership. It seems such a partnership may be constructed through knowledge rather than by resisting that very powerful tool. Though, from her account, it seems likely, that this position is one, which needs to be protected and maintained through effort, engagement and struggle. This circumstance constitutes a dilemma as often those resisting strongest avow to "have no desire to be informed" let alone to have full decision-making powers.

Kate, though, while trying to participate legitimately, found this challenge of accessing a position of power "soul destroying". She described what she saw as inefficiencies in their farm management, which she felt powerless to change.

But over the years, I think you just get sick of – you're in a partnership but you are not really putting in a lot of input. ... In the end you think you're knocking your head against a brick wall. But you know, you go into your marriage and it's a partnership and everything should be shared and the same when you go into a business partnership as well. But there always tends to be the more dominant person or the boss and one's underneath. And that's how I always felt it - as if I was the person underneath, you know. ... And I think,

continuously, as you are getting older too, you felt that your input was probably better than it was as a younger person and yet you are completely ignored. So you sort of think well w-why am I here? All I seem to be doing is just cooking and cleaning and I just feel sort of like a worthless person really, you know? I'm not out on the farm working like I used to, got no family to look after because they've all grown up and gone away and the decision-making is usually done with the other dairy farmer who lives around the road or something. So your input is ignored .... (Kate)

Kate openly declared that she had “no resistance” because she “avoided conflict” and preferred “the peaceful life”. It seems that some resistance is needed if one wants to claim or retain one's share of the power base. But maintenance of ‘self’ is problematic if the women are unable to resist, due to a dominating partner, their own dispositional factors or through an act of (doubtful) ‘choice’. So, maintenance, it seems, requires some resistance applied in combination with knowledge. But it seems a lack of knowledge and a lack of confidence may challenge this process for some.

Sarah, a younger farm woman, described management meetings with their business partners and farm consultant. Although she has been fully involved for several years with the daily operation of their dairying enterprise, both she and the other more senior woman partner, take little part in formal planning and subsequent decisions.

... I sit back and say very little. I'm just like a little sponge. I'm just the token woman unless I have something I really have to say and then I butt in. The farm advisor and the four of us (two couples) will sit around the table and yeah I do probably say a bit but at the end of the day Mike is the manager. I'm the backup but he's the one who does the pasture management and all that ... so that's why I sit back ... and Lyn does the same. (Sarah)

Thus, Sarah concurred that this is one situation where she doesn't join the bloke's world – in decision-making - especially when it's a more formal situation with the business team or with other professionals. In this particular farming enterprise, it seems that although both women partners attend the management meetings they either haven't the knowledge to play a full role in discussion or do not declare their knowledge. It seems a combination of the two, is more likely the case. I observed that during our interview we were constantly interrupted by phone-calls in relation to a staffing position that had been advertised. Sarah obviously had a depth and range of knowledge regarding the farming practice and spoke with ease and authority to a number of employment agencies and others with enquiries. It seems that it is her

position, her sense of place rather than her lack of knowledge that keeps her out of the major discussions and decision-making, although undoubtedly she has gaps in her knowledge too. It may come down to the fact that, she doesn't want the knowledge or the responsibility as she eventually declared that she would "rather be doing other things for her self". This is a common claim often only made after reflection on individual realities.

These 'choices', though, are often embedded in ambivalence as it seems that what is often seen as 'choice' is more accurately one of 'decision'. It could be said that a decision to marry a farmer is in many ways a decision to 'become' a farmer your self. As a response to a sense of equality, there has been considerable pressure over the last twenty or so years for farm wives to 'become' female farmers whether they really want to or not. But, while 'becoming' is a product of constructing new meanings, maintenance is more one of advancing in authority and in position with self-verification. Maintenance requires a sense, at least, of personal choice, achievement and value. Some, like Bronwyn, who somewhat reluctantly made the decision to become fully involved in farm-management, have hidden aspirations. She freely admitted, with some conviction, that her deep desire would be to complete a law degree and to work in that field, at which she thinks she "would be very good". Her reality is that after reflection she chose farming for a combination of reasons, including maintaining the family farm and her marriage relationship. While this illustrates a dilemma that many people would confront at crossroads in their lives or careers, the difference is that for these women, like Bronwyn (originally an in-migrant from Europe), they have traded off their own career almost entirely over a number of years, depicting issues of entrapment. Entrapment, while both personal and social in origin, is a manifestation of restricted options due to one's earlier life choices. While some of the women participants feel in control of their destiny enough to appear not to resent their limited choices, others build resentment, aggression or even fatigue until transformative and major decisions are made to escape their restrictions.

It seems, though, that even with the best intentions most farm women succumb to the limitations farm-life imposes. Although many women genuinely love the life of farming, in 'becoming' they trade off other selves that they see as possible. It is unclear, though, to what extent self-maintenance is possible with this trade-off. Indeed, such bartering can be self-destructive and hostile to true self-maintenance. What is clear, though, is that many of the women participants exhibit a loss of

confidence in their personal abilities and so tell themselves that the possible is in fact impossible. Relationships of power, knowledge, gender and ownership, at times openly and sometimes subtly, manipulate the woman's position and self-confidence. These relationships are produced, maintained and transformed not only through the "cultural and social relations of power between women and men, (but also among women and [among] men)" (Hodgson, 2001, p.16). Many of the women in this study are redefining boundaries by challenging power inequalities embedded in their specific cultural situations. Because of the entanglement of farm, family, work and production, it is difficult to understand these relationships of power without considering the men's place in the lives of these women. The following section elaborates on this issue.

In sum, from these accounts, then, it is learned that while 'becoming' is a product of constructing new meanings, maintenance is more one of advancing in authority and in position, within recognisable points of self-verification. Maintenance requires a sense, at least, of personal achievement and value. While some women try to navigate an assumed role in farm management, it is problematic, firstly, as it seems difficult to assert a position of empowerment and, secondly, due to a reluctance borne out of hidden and often frustrated, personal aspirations. It seems, though, that even with the best intentions most farm women succumb to the limiting positions that farm-life imposes. It seems that how women manage issues of entrapment are relative to how they experience their marriage relationship and how they are placed in this gendered power exchange.

### **The place of husbands in farm-marriages and farm-life**

In the 1970s, when many of the older participating women married, feminism was an increasing force, either directly or indirectly, in the lives of urban women. Yet, it seems that there was little traction in rural areas, where it was thought there was more gender equality because of the work/life merger and historical value of reproduction (Papanek, 1973; Sander, 1985). Historically, for the survival of the family farm, it was critical for women to reproduce the next generation of labour units and to enable continuity and succession of the farming enterprise. Gender equality in the workplace was not a major issue in this environment, because roles were largely unquestioned and place clearly understood. Likely, it would have unsettled the cultural balance, had

feminism gained legitimacy. The strongly patriarchal ethos of the day, while encouraging interdependence, in fact enforced a dependency of the wife on the husband. It was likely that, with the pressures of (then) close-knit communities, farm women's loyalty to their husbands was a geographical and cultural necessity. By accounts, the resulting dependency of farm women influenced a suspicion, resistance and even abhorrence to the, then, growing-phenomenon of feminism (see Carbert, 1995).

Also, in the 1970s, marriage was a social expectation and there was overt pressure on young women to wed in avoidance of being "left on the shelf". For Helen, marriage was important. It was a natural progression for her as a farmer's daughter to marry a farmer and to marry young, aged 21 years. "After all", as she said in a hushed tone, "I might have thought that I would 'miss the boat' if I didn't grab him – that's pretty serious isn't it." This attitude that marriage was a critical part of being a young woman, and one not to be threatened or missed, has changed. Younger New Zealand women, especially those with tertiary education, now travel overseas with male or female friends, without social judgement. Yet, many often maintain relationships at a distance, for a considerable time. This younger generation of women are more inclined to avoid exclusive entrapment in their relationships, expecting the men to invest heavily in the partnership also. Back in the 1970s, though, for women like Helen it was considered the women's responsibility to support the man's needs and career and to feel content with that – even grateful. The men held a superior position in the relationship and these social and cultural attitudes lent heavily to entrapment in over-commitment (McElhinney & Proctor, 2005). Helen reflects now, though, that "they [husbands] are important but it sort of changes a bit doesn't it? ... (But) they *are* number one because your whole world revolves around what they want. I wouldn't say 'demands' but like, our day is determined by when your husband needs you. Gosh that sounds terrible, but it really does, doesn't it?" This cohort, as new wives during the 1970s and 1980s, typically became almost totally engulfed in their husbands' identities. While these women commonly use terms like "you just make the most of things", "it's just the way it is" and "it's your lot", they concurrently often used the word contented. As Anne, now a widow, reflected:

No, I was *content*. While he was there, I just loved his company and when we had the bigger place and he didn't have to go out to work I was just really *content* helping him, feeding out. I love stock work, you know. I was very

*content* and I ...didn't go out except for school things and my garden club probably. ... But no I was just very *contented* there with [husband], at home. ...There were always men coming and going and I was always cooking. He was always bringing people in for cups of tea and meals because he was very sociable. But I was used to that. I did sometimes get fed up with all the cooking – because it was three decent meals a day plus smokos and oh, you were forever cooking, *cooking* but that's – yes I did get a bit fed up with that. (Anne)

This *contentedness* (my emphases), while on the surface indicating full satisfaction, seems more one of acceptance, a willingness to accept the circumstances (all the cooking) and possibly restraining desires in return for peace of mind and the companionship of a loved or, in some cases, little-loved partner. It also indicates an engulfment of identities where the woman identifies strongly through her marriage relationship, her husband and his chosen career. This concept of engulfment is consistent with Adler and Adler's (1991) analysis of such capture embodying structural, social and historical influences - influences which even younger women find difficult to contest. Indeed, many of the current generation side step this influence by avoid engaging with it. But for those that engage, there is a different basis to the negotiation.

### ***Generational differences***

The generational differences that are influencing the current generation of young New Zealand women to often reject farm-life also play out for women who have become farmer's wives. The younger farm women, (i.e. those who married in the 1990s to 2000s), report exercising more agency more easily than earlier generations, while recognising that their lives circulate around their husbands' careers and are subversively entangled. Rachel talked about "looking after" her husband and Sarah noted that she was "lucky" that Mike would "let" her go off-farm to work. But both these younger women talked about being a team and about working through the tough issues in order to maintain their 'self'. As Rachel put it, "... we [self and husband] are actually a really good team together. And we do sit down and nut things out and, of course, we do have our rows, which is probably quite good too." While the previous generation of farm women are reluctant to speak of issues with their husbands, they intersperse their stories with descriptive words like "dominant", "controlling" and "personalising" in regard to their husbands. They talk of "going for the quiet life" and

“not wanting to rock the boat”. However, Rachel fairly represents the younger women when she says “of course we all like a peaceful life, but you do have to rock the boat occasionally, I’m afraid. You have to stand up for yourself.” And when asked what they would do differently if they had their time over again several young women in the field were very quick to say, “I definitely wouldn’t marry a farmer,” “I *so* regret marrying a farmer,” “I wouldn’t get married” and “I wouldn’t marry someone on a family farm”. Again and maybe as avoidance or through a sense of loyalty, the older women rather than reflecting on their own lives are more likely to refer to their daughters or daughters-in-law or even their mothers when they consider their own lives. They make comments like, “Yes, I have had a hard life and I wouldn’t want my daughter to go through what I’ve been through”. Or, “I look at [my daughter-in-law] and I think “same old, same old, nothing’s changed.” And “I said to [my son] ‘do you really think this is fair on Clare? Shouldn’t you consider other options for both your sakes?’” These sentiments are consistent with O’Hara’s (1998) findings that some farm mothers exert critical influence on their children’s occupational options due to experiencing farming as risky and stressful with personal limitations and with an increasingly illusive lifestyle.

There is still a tendency, however, for such women to disregard these thoughts and feelings when it comes to their son’s aspirations and the future of the family farm. Although such qualifications do come to the fore when interviewing farm women, in their everyday life such issues are not likely to be discussed openly. The future of their family farm and the happiness of the men curtail most radical thoughts. Those who actively seek to support the needs of sons’ incoming life-partners/wives, remain uncommon. This is possibly related to the women’s own experiences of entrapment. They have invested so much of their lives into the farm that although they ‘know’ the issues, the need to protect their life’s investment (e.g. their son and the farm) is overwhelming and issues are often not consciously acknowledged or verbalised in company. As such, some mothers find this generational difference a great personal threat as the farm that they have often sacrificed their very being for is about to be threatened by the next generation of women i.e. their son’s partners who have careers “better suited to Auckland [City]” or another larger metropolis. These mothers’ undisguised disgust, indignation and fear are very real. One mother said, “But, he [her son] really wants to farm and why should he give it up for her career?” In some cases, such resistance by young women is leading to the sale of farms that have been in the

family for many generations. As one of the younger women, in talking about these issues, said,

... And we are sort of breaking the waters for the next ones to come along. But I know even from just up that way [a neighbour], they've got a son and they want him to take over the farm and his girlfriend has got the most fantastic career in [the city] and she won't come. And (laughs) the poor lady's like 'oh my god, (laughs) what are we going to do – he would like to go farming but she won't come with him' – and I mean the farm's been in their family for generations and generations.

Such situations are perhaps more common than is recognised by the industry and stand as looming crises for the sustainability of the family farm in New Zealand. The apparent mirth that this young woman found in this neighbouring woman's plight may express a generational divide. The preparedness of younger women to question the fairness and equality of farm gender and power relationships is intrinsic to such attitudes. This again depicts generational differences which contribute to conflict between cohorts. While issues of self-maintenance are so obvious to many young women, many women from earlier cohorts find it distressing to be challenged by the next generation of women. This not only threatens their position but also threatens what they now see as their family's heritage. Discussions emerging, though, in response to the media publicity surrounding this research, are quietly giving women "permission to have the conversations" with each other (as one woman put it). This dialogue and exchange of personal stories are proving to be enlightening for women as the unspoken is spoken. It is powerful to see women exchanging such personal accounts and to see the momentary relief of common disclosure; a sense of 'reveal' and brutal honesty, so elusive for women within the culture of farming.

It seems from these women's accounts, though, that many are having more difficult 'conversations' in their homes with the men as they face power relationships. These gender and power relations are critical to persistence of patriarchal authority in the farm-business and farm-marriage, as is discussed in the next sub-section.

### ***The place of the marriage relationship***

As the participants depict, it is clear that the positioning of power in relationship is critical within the farm-marriage. The physical and sexual maintenance of the marriage was not discussed in this research. However, it seems that if the marriage is reciprocal in social and emotional maintenance, then the women ensure that their

decisions interlock in some way with their farm-life. Yet, if they “grow apart” and find they “have little in common” then the women either retreat to living parallel lives or eventually make the decision to leave the farm-marriage. (This became clear from the women’s stories as will be depicted in the following chapter).

In contrast, men often seem genuinely to not understand such issues as they view farm-life from a very different perspective with farming commonly being their great love and passion. Others, though, know deep down that these issues exist. Since the initial findings of my research were reported through the national media, many such men have approached me “knowing” these circumstances from their personal lives. While they “understand” at some level because they have lived through periods of interpersonal and farming struggle, they also appear genuinely confused. They seem to feel some guilt about their wives’ positions and (maybe) have a desire to further understand while a minority are scathingly in their assessment. I was initially somewhat surprised by this overwhelming supportive interest and protective support from many farming men. It conveyed a sense of goodwill and a sense of hope. Some men have exhibited relief at hearing of the common reality with which they and their wives have been living and attempting to coping with, but in confused and isolated ignorance. Several farming men, like women, have been moved to tears at presentations of findings that are often a relief or (as one farming man said) “a moment of truth”. Yet, one such male farmer somewhat perceptively said, “Do you think it is women who pressure other women?” He went on to tell me how his mother would criticise his wife when she was away pursuing her own interests, saying, “she should be home here getting you a good meal, not gallivanting about!” How he responded to this is unknown, but in saying this he was touching on an emerging finding that often these social and cultural relations of power are in fact maintained and protected by women exerting power over other women, particularly intergenerationally.

### **Family power and control: Summary**

From the above, then, we see that it is becoming more common for issues of power and control from within the marriage or within the extended farm family, to be resisted. While the newer generation of farm women may challenge their position more immediately, the older cohort of farm women are also questioning their place,

often after many years of marriage. Some, though, are constrained within an engulfed identity to sustain a sense of familiarity with increasing entrapment, which may then manifest as embitterment or unwellness. Consequentially, they may resent those resistors who challenge their illusion of contentment.

Those resisting, unfortunately, often face their greatest opposition from amongst farm women with considerable power established from cultural and social status and influence. This is in contrast to what appears to be a minority of senior women who seek to nurture the next generation to make changes. It seems that for some women, though, it is very challenging and confrontational to even contemplate other possibilities or to observe others forging new frontiers. It may be threatening for them to consider that the life they have lived for thirty or forty years could have been different or better. It may be “too close to the bone” as many women have put it, after attending a presentation on the findings of this thesis, while one said it was “a disturbing reality” for her, which she followed with, “I feel like crying”. It is also confronting to think that the survival of the family farming property that they have worked so hard to maintain and sustain may be threatened by the next generation because their son’s partner cannot, or does not want to, live the life it imposes. While these issues are very complex and cannot be easily separated, many of those that need to be challenged by both farming women and men, begin with a range of isolations rooted in historic power and gender inequalities, as is now established.

### **Issues of power, gender and isolation**

Issues of power, gender and isolations are often historical in origin (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987). Many isolating issues raised by the women are rooted in dependencies. A common expression is that “the farm always comes first”, to a point that the women themselves become unable to spend money without major anxiety, even though they have an asset often worth several million dollars. In contrast, frequently farm decisions are made and put in place overnight and without any major contemplation. As one farmer said, “If I read about a good idea for streamlining the daily routine, I can put it in place the next day” (Allan, 2002). Such dependencies may be manipulative and isolating (Erasmus, 2006) where the women feel social and cultural approval for their selfless caring, which then results in a

feeling of guilt when caring for or taking time out for 'self' (Murray, 2007). As Helen said:

I think sometimes you just don't want to be *wanted* or *needed*. I think that's probably what it is, isn't it? You just want to be free – when Lester goes away for the day I just love it (whispers) and the earlier he goes the better – he knows that now - I tell him. But why do [I] love it? ... [She recalled a recent day alone] I usually still cook dinner in the middle of the day – I *did nothing!* At the end of the day I thought 'ohhh I'd better get things tidied up a bit before he comes home', because I've done nothing the whole day. I would have chatted to a few people on the phone, been on the internet a wee bit and essentially nothing. Well there are five loads of washing that's taken the whole day to do but its funny really – you just recharge. (Helen)

While Helen clearly enjoyed having a day at home by herself, it seemed to be somewhat defeated by her sense of guilt in saying that she then thought she'd better get the place cleaned up before her husband arrived home. She is describing what many women voiced as a constant desire or need to please and to keep the peace. It seems that, to not do so, is threatening or even somewhat letting the side down and proving to be a poor farm wife. Often such dependency, built on meeting the needs of the husband's career, life and his 'self', is manipulative. One woman describing her reluctance to "feed fourteen men for a week" was then praised by one of the "boys" who told her what a great cook she was and she "got conned" and felt energised to face the work with some feeling of appreciation. While the genuine acknowledgement was very welcome and appreciated by this woman it also made it more difficult for her to even modify her practices by buying in pre-made food, which she felt would be less admired. It is a perceived lack of freedom of choice and self-value that makes this servitude harmful. For a woman to challenge these behaviours in herself requires a huge internal power struggle, as the woman seeks to expand her horizons and extend her perception of 'self'; in effect maintaining her 'self' towards transformation and refusing to be regulated or controlled.

Many women referred to controlling behaviours. Carol had quietly "put up with" such control for an extensive number of years. She had become aware of the personal destruction that this was causing and decided that she wouldn't put up with any more of her husband's "controlling behaviour". She confessed during her interview that she was seeking to remedy the situation either by making major changes in her marriage-relationship or possibly by making personal choices, which might threaten the viability of their marriage and their farm. This decision was not

being taken lightly and was in conflict with her sense of belonging; that the farm was her home, which she loved, but that she has since left. Carol is renewing her belief that she matters as a person, a thought buried over many years. As a product of 'becoming', farm women like Carol often then have major problems with self-maintenance. It seems that maintenance of the farm, its culture and its future needs are often incompatible with the needs of self-maintenance. Farm women are inclined, over time, to adopt the belief that spending time, effort and money on their selves and their needs is a waste and a poor economic decision, thus reproducing historical values.

### *Issues of self maintenance*

Maintenance of self, then, is problematic for most of the farm women spoken to, as socio-cultural expectations, and pressure to conform, overwhelm. Yet, these women lead a life almost entirely isolated from others of like-minds, especially good confiding female friends. Two partial exceptions are Rachel and Helen. The former has a small peer group of women with whom she works hard at maintaining and the latter who is actively committed to a rural women's group. The degree of these connections in supporting the individual woman's sense of self is debateable. It seems that when women make connections with other women, these relationships are difficult to prioritise and maintain.

It is particularly problematic being part of an extended farming-family and several women described their lives as being "like constantly walking on eggshells." They describe an environment of entrapment in dominant, complex inter-relationships where they have difficulty knowing or being their selves. The phrase 'walking on eggshells' is one that comes up repeatedly. This indication of a constant need to restrain oneself on a daily basis, due to a controlling farm-marriage partnership or extended-family-farm situation, is soul-destroying and a major threat to mental wellness. It seems very pertinent that two young women followed up such disclosures with the revelation that they had plans for how they could find closure by "taking their lives" or "finishing it" (i.e. contemplating suicide). While both are working on their mental health issues they are far from reaching a solution. Both of these situations involve very traditional extended farming families and a range of isolations with fractured images of self. While they work on their mental wellness, by far the

greater challenge is resolving their extended family-farm issues. These issues are not freely accepted nor taken seriously: the women, by all accounts, were expected and required to 'get their act together' or to 'pull their selves together'. It seems men and women alike have made these issues the incoming woman's problem rather than putting it onto the farming work-practice and social practice where it belongs. This depth of despair may be more common than many would like to accept. Numerous women in similar situations have approached me as my research became publicised. While this phenomenon exists in farm-couple business partnerships, the extended family-farm concept seems particularly detrimental to the mental health of some farm women participants. This emerges as a major issue and presents a huge challenge to the industry, as it has wide implications not only for the very essence of farm women's wellbeing but also for a sustainable future of the family farm.

There is a perception by some that rural women's advocacy groups could assist in supporting such women through social contact with other rural women. This, though, no longer seems to be the reality for most women spoken to in this study. More importantly, this study strongly challenges such 'micro' solutions to a 'macro' problem, i.e. fixing the woman not the culture; a tendency to medicalise and personalise a cultural issue. While this challenge is established further in this dissertation, the next section considers the experiences and perceptions of support, through rural women's groups, according to the participants.

### **The place of rural women's groups in maintaining self through community**

The main women's groups for rural women in New Zealand are Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) and the Country Women's Institute (CWI). While both these groups have a history of large memberships into the 1960s, their numbers have dropped dramatically (i.e. from 30,000 in 1960 to 8,000 in 2006 for RWNZ). Their memberships are also aging, with the average age, according to inside sources, being well into the mid-sixty age bracket. This indicates a limited place for this ailing but still, arguably, politically powerful organisation. The groups' place in the lives of the modern farm woman seems, for most, irrelevant or non-existent and their effectiveness as advocates for farming and rural women is questioned by participants in this research. Most participants have commented about going along to such women's groups once or twice and then not going back again. Others describe how

they attend sporadically and reluctantly just to be seen to be inclusive, although it doesn't really interest them or meet their needs. By many accounts the domestic competitiveness and formality of such meetings "did nothing" for these women, although many expressed an interest in meeting other women. So although many were pressured to attend as memberships dwindled, most resisted engaging.

As Anne said, "I just don't like meetings ... it was just the fact of the meetings side I didn't like." Pam was more forceful, though, regarding the pressure applied to her to take part in WDFP (Women's Division of Federated Farmers - now RWNZ). "It was the competitions for me - comparing baking and crafts all seemed puerile to me." She expressed a view that while she was interested in some of the political side of the organisation like "a [conference] remit where they were trying to get kids under 12 years of age kept off tractors, or the sheep dip covered." But that "coming from a town I thought, 'gosh this is all a bit dreary.'" She went on to describe "jostling amongst certain ladies in [the district], to be the 'head serang' and be in charge of that little hub of national committee business." But coming from town she didn't want to be part of this ritual. Pam expressed a sense of indifference when it came to making cakes, mainly because she wasn't interested in this skill. She didn't want to get involved in something where she hadn't "the capabilities that these country ladies had. My capabilities were in a different area and I certainly didn't want to make buttons into a brooch." Her husband though, was "very disappointed" in her as his mother had been very involved with WDFP and he felt she would regret not having the support of the group. And her mother-in-law thought she "was just the most miserable piker not taking part in that community. There *was huge* pressure to take part." Pam felt that other members judged her choice of non-membership by thinking she thought she was "above them" but she questioned their aims and service as being irrelevant, particularly to younger women.

This was at a time following the 1970s second wave of feminism, which was forging urban change. As an urban woman she thought she would rather go to the Federated Farmers' meetings with the men. Pam viewed urban-raised women in her district (adjacent to a large city) forcing change because, as she recalled:

Part of it was they were trying to turn us into *farmers' wives*. And some of us bucked the system possibly because you had teacher training and you were more practically-based but, in some ways ... the culture has been changed by people *not* participating in those particular groups. ... There were women who

had lived the life as it was and then you came to the district because you had married a farmer and suddenly there was this great thing – [in-migrating urban women]; people who could plan, people who could organise, standing up and reading the riot act about things, [differently] capable women. And I reckon some of those traditional women found us a threat in a way. That we had these other capabilities and that we could actually earn a living when there was a drought and so they down-played anything we could do and ‘upped the ante’ about how good they were at making sponge cakes. It was a means of holding their ‘mana’ [i.e. position of high regard and status]. (Pam)

Pam, as an urban born farm woman who lived close to a larger city, was one of the first women in her district to resume her career of teaching and made a very successful work-life for herself at a large educational institution, in the nearby metropolis. It seems that resuming a successful career was a means of self-maintenance, yet served to further isolate her from her farming peers. Education, though, was a means to further opportunities which led to regular transformative experiences for her. It did though require agency: an independent mind and what she called “sheer bloody mindedness”. It seems maintenance of ‘self’ requires healthy resistance combined with challenging experiences and possibly intellectual stimulation.

Education, it seems, can be a catalyst for change, both individually and culturally. A correlation has been identified between higher education levels for young women from the late 1960s and a source of values and aspirations beyond domesticity (Parker, 1988, as cited in Teather, 1996). It is not surprising, then, that membership in New Zealand’s rural women’s organisations began to fall from the 1960s when women more commonly sought tertiary education. The gulf widened, with a cultural-lag in the organisation’s sense of purpose rendering them irrelevant to a generation of better-educated young women. These women’s organisations, seemingly, often reflect particular sets of values which are inclined to play one generation off against another. Through power struggles, pressure to conform and the protection of what many have expressed as well-outdated values, intergenerational tensions persist. This persistence may then prescribe to entrapment for those women who just go along with it in order to be seen as participating or to defend tradition. In reality, though, it may lessen choice and possibilities for women who accede to such ideology, rather than broaden options.

In contrast though, it must be said that for Helen, farm daughter and teacher trained, WDFP (now RWNZ) has played a major part in her life as a farm woman.

She sees it as “important socially” for her as well as being a community service. Yet, other women who are lacking social contact with like-women are not so driven to become a member of a rural women’s group. For a range of reasons, including relieving social and genderised isolations, RWNZ is intrinsic to Helen’s well-being. It allows her to temporarily break out of entrapments, through “important” meetings that are prioritised in the farm-household, and through “having a giggle” with mates. Recently, I have witnessed this ‘mateship’ in women at RWNZ meetings where I have attended as a speaker presenting findings of my research. While I don’t believe that many of these women really credit the group with being entirely satisfying, it does fulfil a social need and is supportive in relieving isolations by allowing legitimate time-out from, unspoken about, personal and farm-household problems or issues. As one woman said, “Without RWNZ we would go mad.”

While such women’s advocacy groups (whose memberships consist of a range of rural women not only those farming) have ‘political clout’, it is unclear whether they truly advocate for farming women or whether they seek more to maintain the status quo. Several women, though, justified membership to RWNZ through the access it gave them to political information while others belonged through an auxiliary dinner group that had a social and learning function. Many, though, supported the view of gender dimensions of rurality being slowed by lack of perceptive progress for change amongst institutional women’s advocacy groups (Teather, 1996). While the value of this organisation is doubtful for the majority of farm women, it is clear from Helen and other members, that the group fills a genuine need in their lives for constancy. It offers a continuity that is difficult to find in other groups that have a finality - an end to membership due to changed circumstances e.g. young mothers’ groups or school parent/teacher groups. Helen makes a very pertinent point with the observation that when your children are your career, as they leave each stage of their lifespan and development any social contact relating to it also finishes for the mother. At times when this involvement ceases it can result in grief and loss of identity, as Helen experienced when her time on the High School Board of Trustees (i.e. governance) finished. The confusion that this void created for her was genuine and critical, a crisis point that manifested as prolonged depressive symptoms.

In summary, then, while for a minority of farm women, rural women’s groups become part of their recreation and even their work, for the majority of women, their value in contributing to their sense of self are, at the very least, doubtful. So, for many

farm women there is a default to farmwork as a means of maintaining 'self', as the dependency of their child-rearing career tapers away. But, farm women's occupational roles and identities, both on-farm and off-farm, are problematic. The intensity of parenting in a rural situation combined with farming responsibilities seems to heighten the difference of gendered roles, both in the occupational roles of farming and in access to off-farm work. Again, there are different bases by which these women negotiate their place and sense of self, and at different stages of their lives.

Building on this relational aspect, the next section discusses such gender relations particularly in regard to farm women's work and health and how gender is constructed through work experiences and participation (Alvesson & Billing, 1997).

### **Work and health: Constructing and reconstructing identities**

How gender identities are constructed and reconstructed through work and other interpersonal relationships is debated through different ideological arguments. Feminist post-structuralists considering socially-constructed, gender-identity formation (Pini, 2005), have found it useful to analyse the emphases on feminine and masculine aspects of occupational roles. These concepts kept surfacing from the women's stories, which validates pursuance of gender issues through considering the 'choice' between working on-farm or seeking employment elsewhere. Of particular importance are issues identified in relation to the women's personal wellness, mental stimulation (or lack of the same) and sense of satisfaction, along with issues of 'policing' of women's 'choices' and decisions by other farm women.

### ***Fitting the mould or breaking it – a challenge among women***

As noted, a key issue for farm women is the degree by which they act to reproduce or transform the existing farm-life culture that entraps so many women. Most participating farm women declared periods of heavy involvement in farmwork. They invariably expressed a stronger preference for working with stock (i.e. animals) rather than machinery, although not exclusively. How much of this more stereotypical feminine precedence is truly preference and choice, or imposed through cultural and social influences and expectations remains unclear. Shortall (2000) notes, that when milking cows became mechanised there was a distinct move away from dairy maids

to male labour. However, now the work has become routine and repetitive, there is a trend back to the convenience of and preference for, female dairy labour. It seems that innovative mechanisation denotes men's work, suggesting it is not a choice or a preference but a socialised belief corresponding to men's needs. Shortall (ibid) saw this change in roles as men reclaiming what they saw as mechanical and therefore men's work thus relegating women to less valued and less important work-roles.

How this social manipulation may impact on a woman's sense of self is unclear, but it presumes a compliance and adaptability on behalf of women, which can be disintegrative. It indicates a type of identity regulation, which is seen by Alvesson and Willmott, (2004) as an intentional effect of social or work practices upon identity construction and reconstruction. Such identity restriction seems unsustainable over time as most women spoken to acknowledge eventually finding the work inhibiting, through its limitations and the fact that it is not their career of choice. Adding to this, (as discussed Chapter 6) these farm women recognise that living and working in a male-dominated social and occupational world effects them to become masculinised to some degree; not necessarily by choice, but through contextual influences. This concentration on male company and dominance enforces a need to have multiple identities; emphasising femininity on occasions and yet masculinities on a more regular everyday basis as one co-identifies with one's husband and other industry or work mates. This seems to contribute to an aggressive, defensive attitude by some women exercising control over other women, thereby seeming to mimic the control they confess to have experienced from male domination in their lives. Many women described being pressured by other women in a type of 'policing'. This control extends to protection of the dominant, and often mythical, beliefs and even appears as a desperate attempt to maintain their private miseries as they often continue to exist within relationships of prolonged entrapment.

Participants' accounts reveal a source of personal disconnection founded within this phenomenon of farming women restricting other farm women's choices, knowledge and work; bound through lack of acceptance and lack of tolerance for difference. For example, one farm son told me that his mother had worked over a number of years at a range of nursing positions, which under-utilised her skills. However, after gaining an advanced qualification, she had been sought by others both nationally and internationally for her expertise assisted by her newly-found confidence. Yet, a neighbour (a similar age to his mother) told him recently that she

thought his mother was “very selfish”, in leading her own life. This young man is very proud of his mother’s achievements and made the comment that he wouldn’t want to be married to someone like that particular neighbour. He also went on to make the point that it was very difficult to find a stimulating young woman who would agree to live in his situation. It seems that stimulating young women, and the restrictions of life on relatively isolated farms, are not an easy match. Often such women are used to having their opinions and knowledge given credibility and validation. So, to enter farming circles, where they see a need to battle for this recognition even amongst their peers and sister-ship is daunting, given the fact that they, almost certainly, have personal needs and plans that are far from traditional.

Others have recognised similar power and control by farming men over women as daunting for those attempting to enter political farming positions (Alston, 1998a, 2003). A similar exercise of power and control among women though, may require more than breaking through the ‘grass ceiling’ (Alston, 2000). It seems that farming women need to be challenged to support each other and to be more generous and authentic in their responses, in order to encourage progress in balancing genuine power relations between and among farming women and men. Quite rightly the power imbalances between farming women and men have been challenged, with calls for genuine positions of power rather than mere tokenism (Alston, 2003). But a worthy prerequisite might be for women to recognise their own inadequacies in power relationships amongst their own kind - deficiencies that encumber women who challenge accepted norms. A supportive standpoint may, through liberating women’s own subjectivities and strengthening relationships between and among women, encourage leadership (Ransom, 1997). The place of innovative leadership from women in farming circles is driven by confidence and knowledge, a confidence that from the accounts of many women in this study is often broken by and unsupported by, other women.

Such lack of support within their own gender stands to further limit choice for many women, culminating in work and health issues in relation to sense of self and sense of value. This often adds to an impoverished position within dominant power and gender relations in their work, social and kinship organisations, i.e. farm, community and farming family. The lack of stimulation and personal challenge, experienced within such isolating environments, often create difficult negotiating positions from which to seek personal maintenance.

### *Suppression, repression or depression - work and health*

It follows then, that maintenance of self, by definition, entails personal care, support, stimulation and upkeep and yet the women participating in this study talk of repression and suppression while often describing or exhibiting depressive symptoms. Rachel described well her lack of opportunities and choice of career. While, by commuting, she can train as a schoolteacher, it is difficult for her to actually participate in teaching practice without shifting to another location; a battle for which she is preparing herself. This is a common predicament for many farm wives. In order to 'belong' and to maintain their 'self', they need to make a personal career either on or close to the farm. Lack of opportunities off-farm, often lead the women by default to either become the stereotypical helper or to construct an often ever-enlarging garden along with reconstructing the house, if finances will allow. These 'house and garden' farm women are very common and seem to be some of the more successful farm women on the surface. The reality, though, is different. This research has exposed a view that these women often have selected this 'choice' as a means of survival, but rather than a *means* it becomes an *end*. One farmer said to me recently, when talking about his wife, that she is "bored out of her brain" and that she "won't play golf and she isn't interested in gardening so what do you do ...?" His voice drifted off in exasperation, but tinged with concern. What does a woman do in these circumstances? Her five children have all long-since left home, she has no formal qualifications, she isn't interested in farm work (of which she has had her fill over the years), she helps when needed but only reluctantly, and she has little self-confidence after living a life not of her choosing for around 30 years. Such women are in a state of limbo, one that is not sustainable but which some women accept as their 'lot' due to inability to choose other options - an image of entrapment.

One such woman who is "still feeding four adults every day" said to me "well I suppose it's my *choice* but I *really am* married to the farm. I may as well not *be* married as [husband] is never here and we never do anything together." This woman has worked at many menial jobs over the years in order to financially support the farm household, cooking at a hotel, working as a barmaid and driving the school bus, while also helping on the farm. She now feels "worn out" and yet can't see an end to her mundane and hardworking life. Her perception of 'choice' in some ways reinforces her decision. Within the conversation she pondered that if she made other choices i.e.

to leave the farm, it would mean leaving her marriage and “that affects everyone then”; while at the moment she sees it *only* affecting her. There is a question here about whether such women really have choice, and whether or not they actually make a decision, or alternatively “just drift”, as one woman put it. What is clear is that such women care for everyone else but little is left for their ‘self’. Many choices are social and cultural manipulations, which are extremely difficult to avoid if an individual is seeking to belong. Inclusiveness requires some submission, it seems.

It appears, from these women, that avoidance of manipulative participation, while attempting to maintain personal authenticity, can result in a spurious existence retreating to social exclusivity, especially if associated with a reluctance or inability to reinvent the ‘self’. If, like the woman above, the house, garden and golf scenario is not of interest and the confidence, skill level or farming situation disallows off-farm work, then social contacts are limited. One such woman participant had become a social recluse, with her family being both a burden and a relief; they were her main social contact. However, since retiring to town (after forty years), her life has opened up dramatically and she has been transformed into a woman loving and living life. Her existence on-farm really was a “life sentence” of entrapment, relieved only at this late stage. According to the experiences of many women, it seems this may be a common phenomenon as a transitional self, which is incohesive and disorientating, becomes the accepted norm, something to be “put up with”, often for a lengthy period. There is a tendency for transition to become endless and permanent. As such, health and well-being is not individually manifested but influenced by a range of social, physical, political and environmental facets. It is conclusive that while farm women traditionally have supported their husbands’ farming careers and life needs, the converse does not easily apply. Women, it seems, may initially tolerate such a position while ‘becoming’ but this position is not sustainable and is eventually challenged as, or if, women seek self-maintenance.

The following section further elaborates and analyses the place of resistance and accommodation in the concept of identity regulation and entrapment. It considers theory of how farm women maintain their ‘self’ within their roles as farm wives and how this challenges the maintenance and sustainability of farming culture as we know it, while suggesting possible resolutions.

## **Maintaining self: Negotiation, choice, entrapment and power**

So far, this chapter has told of the farm women participants' struggles to maintain self within their life decision of marriage to a farmer, farming enterprise and often an extended farming family. It reveals a complicated entanglement of negotiation between social and individual bases and processes. Although individual experiences are unique to their situation, social influences are highlighted. These influences include (but are not exclusive to) being urban or rural-raised, level and type of education and training, self-confidence in personal and inter-personal skills, as well as gender and power relations within the farm-marriage, farming enterprise and community. A major division, boldly exhibited, is the intergenerational difference in expectations and attitudes of farm women. The following conclusive sections further develop these issues towards a theoretical base for maintenance of self, within an often dominating, isolating and unforgiving culture. It pursues the place of resistance and accommodation in the concepts of identity regulation and entrapment while considering theory of how farm women maintain their self within their roles as farm wives. It further questions how this challenges the maintenance and sustainability of farming culture as we know it.

### **Identity regulation through cultural pressures and expectations**

Strong interconnections between identity regulation and issues of entrapment emerge in these women's accounts. These interconnections are often borne from a range of isolations, including elements of geographical, emotional, psychological, gendered and social isolations, which limit construction of an authentic identity and allow ease of regulation. A form of identity regulation is, then, enforced subtly through fragmenting the very 'self' of the women. Concurrently, the lack of common support from like-minded people with stimulating interactions, often cast women into a void, an empty space. Farm women, it seems, generate individual responses and solutions to these often soul-destroying effects of living and working on-farm. The geographical isolation, which is presumed by many to be the major cause of women's feelings of being alone, is in fact the least troublesome to most women in this study. While such physical isolation is often more problematic initially, the women talk of the effects of the other isolations as being more oppressive. Being separated from other women who have similar interests and who enjoy similar discourse and

challenges, makes the women feel “different”. They often reluctantly admit that they haven’t got close female friends they can confide in, relax with, be mentally stimulated by or have fun with. In effect, it seems difficult to have good friends because of the fact that, “everyone is related to someone”, or because confidences have been broken early on and they have learned not to trust.

As a consequence, women often seek off-farm work in order to bridge some of the gaps in their lives and as a means of seeking value and recognition. This is not always successful if the work is not challenging or stimulating enough. Pressures of the ‘third shift’ phenomenon with their farm responsibilities not being adequately completed in their absence may lead to a decision to revert to working at home. Frequently overt pressure comes from other women. If a woman begins to identify through her off-farm work she is often resented by others in less envious positions. There is often a social press, representing a form of identity regulation, imposed on farm women who make other choices; this seemingly threatened response may indicate an unacknowledged sense of entrapment from other women. It may be that in hearing or observing other alternatives, they feel envious or threatened by the possibility that their ‘choice’ may not be as authentic for them as they assume. While the ‘enforcers’ may lack reflexivity, the women pressured, commonly describe an acute awareness of self.

Perceptive self-awareness seems to challenge consistent enforcement of identity regulation, which Alvesson and Willmott (2002; 2004) see as “intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction” (2004, p. 442). An aspect of such regulation commonly observed throughout this research is through farming men commonly identifying through the prefix ‘I’ and ‘my’, as the farmer; the empowered and the owner. Women though, are more likely to see themselves as a team member (thereby referring to ‘us’ and ‘our’), sharing power and ownership. These attitudes and beliefs in relative positioning seem to be differently embedded in both the men’s and women’s identities. While men are often surprised, but amused, when it is pointed out, the women react with clarity and knowing as they invariably concur with some vehemence, “it happens all the time” and “it makes me so mad”. This discourse says much about who has power and spiritual ownership of the farm and recognition for the success of the farming practice. This difference of position seems, strangely, to encourage persistence of the less empowered position of helper even though most women know subconsciously

that in reality they are secondary. While initially that position may have some legitimacy as the women are constructing new knowledge and capacity, over time it is met with reluctance and is not sustainable.

Across the women participants in this project, those who are not farmers' daughters seem better negotiators. This seems to arise from them having access to other sets of values, other roots, with other cultures to invoke in search of meaning and justice along with other expectations and capacities to negotiate that have been developed in earlier, different lives. In amalgamating meaning, they are in effect reinventing their 'self' and culture. Through a feeling of disconnection, the drive to connect or reconnect forces new meanings. However, strong connections are difficult to construct in notoriously conservative farming communities where it is said it takes three generations to "become a local". But reinvention seems to invoke more agentic action and less reliance on social structures. As discussed previously, identity may be regulated also by social groupings with some of the more ardent members of rural women's advocacy groups constructing a collective identity. This depends on their level of engagement and whether they are more accurately observers than active participants. These groups, though, seem by their structure to seek some regulation of identity. Identity regulation, rather worryingly, confuses self-maintenance often by indicating an illusive 'choice'; a choice that then has consequences for the individual woman. Persistence, allegiance and commitment encourage degrees of entrapment as identity is regulated subtly or otherwise.

In summary, it seems that there are strong interconnections between identity regulation and issues of entrapment here. These are often borne from a range of isolations, including elements of geographical, emotional, psychological, genderised and social isolations, which limit construction of an authentic identity and allow ease of regulation. A form of identity regulation is, then, enforced subtly through fragmenting the very 'self' of the women. Concurrently, the lack of common support from like-minded people with stimulating interactions, often cast women into a void, an empty space. This fragmentation may be maintained through doubtful perceptions of 'choice' or challenged through decision.

### *The reality or myth of 'choice' and its consequences*

Choice and its consequences need to be considered within the complexities of farming life and farming culture. While there is a perception that farming culture consists of interdependent communities, the family farm unit is, in fact, an *interdependent community* where individuals need to be *independently* resourceful and resilient. This complexity extends to farm-marriage relationships, and can be alienating and disorientating. It seems, commonly, to be the woman who is the glue that holds these two opposing sets of needs together. From the women's stories it becomes clear that these relationships work best when the women devote themselves to family and farm-life; best that is for others, but not necessarily for the women themselves. As one woman said, "everything else [farm, family, husband, community] comes first and what's left over is for yourself and there usually isn't anything left over." True choice, it seems, often doesn't come into the mix but rather servitude and a sense of responsibility.

Choice or a perception of choice, then, is seen as critical to how a person appreciates and is loyal to the value of their situation. However, if the individual perceives behaviour to be enforced or dictated by external forces, then even if the behaviour is identical, it will be devalued or resented (Iyengar & Lepper, 2002). This set of opposing concepts seems pertinent to the experiences of the farm women in this study. If the farm-marriage relationship is seen to be working then the workload and hardships are often seen as choice. If, however, the farm-marriage is burdensome and feels an imposition, then the same conditions may be resented. These issues, though, are not dichotomous, but comprise complex connections.

At least a *perception* of choice, then, is critical to both self-maintenance and to social expectations. It is assumed that people have choice and that individual choice is an assertion of self-expression and self-interest (Kim & Drolet 2003). However, people often choose by default and in relation to others. In rurality, there is often social pressure to conform, to bury any individual needs, opinions and desires in the interests of harmony. Choice, in cultures (like farming) that are perceived as interdependent, is seen as an interpersonal task rather than an act of self-expression (Kim & Drolet 2003). As such "one's choice is often made by close others and made for close others" (p.375). However, once a move is made that is seen as personal choice then the individual is committed to making that 'choice' work. This confusion

of choice seems to work as both, regulation of identity for many farm women, along with an accompanying sense of entrapment. They 'chose' their situation and so must put up with it and make it work. Even more restrictingly, this image of choice seems to often extend to a sense of responsibility to protect the men's position. Evidence from the farm women participating in this study support the view that farm women's actions, in protecting their husbands' egos, often result in holding back progress for farm women themselves (Teather, 1996; Brandth, 1994 and Mackenzie 1994). This socially imposed position of protector of the farm, farmer and farming family, acts as an identity-regulator that impedes maintenance of 'self' and personal growth.

While maintenance requires either *actively* working at continuance or forging a new direction, a default position may *seem* to maintain. However, defaulting maintains mediocrity with its limitations and dependencies. For some, a cohesive interrelationship between marriage, farm and community, although fraught with difficulties and often exploitative of the 'self', gives some security and some sense of standing. This is particularly so in transitional periods. Again, a known or unknown sense of entrapment has conflicting personal responses as the rewards of status and alliance are weighed against a lack of individual integration. Anti-depressants, and in some cases alcohol, seem to smooth over extreme anxieties for some women through transitional periods, on the way to possible transformations. Relationships with old friends, career and known places are often threatened in the process through over-commitment. But in the struggle to adapt to this new culture valuable knowledge is constructed. With wisdom and personal insight, subsequent change can act as trailblazing for the next generation if the challenge is recognised and elucidated. For some, though, the transition is unsuccessful and an exit is taken, often for the sake of mental wellness. Such unsuccessful transitions are elaborated in some of the events described in the following chapter.

Meanwhile, while acknowledging the uniqueness of farm women's issues and experiences of culture, mystery of maintenance, which follows, is offered as one reflexive example of one woman's ways of coping with such complexities within my specific context.

### ***Mystory of maintenance***

*Maintenance, for me as a farm woman, personally, demands a wide range of the issues encompassed in this chapter, including parenting ( and all it entails in rural life), along with farming responsibilities which became, increasingly, my daily work. Accepting opportunities as they came along, though, I believe was a crucial source of self-maintenance. While these were not necessarily first choices, I was, as many of the women have said, “making the most of my situation”. While there was no plan, looking back now it is clear that one thing led to another, not in a linear way but much more chaotically. This included both paid and unpaid work. Of these different positions, I consider an unpaid voluntary position within controversial health reforms to be the most transformative social practice in which I was involved. On reflection, part of the reason for this effect was working with two different co-ordinators, both women, who seemed to recognise that I had abilities to tap. Others in the Health Authority also reflected their confidence in me. While no doubt it was beneficial for them as an organisation to do so, it was also very confirming for me.*

*Locally though, I had to fight male political figureheads who were critical of my work because I didn't agree with and work towards their personal agendas. While at the time it was upsetting and challenging, it was also character building. But the major influence was forming working relationships with like-minded, quietly confident and quietly supportive women. It was mentally stimulating and confidence-boosting and as such it contributed to my personal growth and eventually to my decision to progress to post-graduate study. By that stage I had furthered my education from registered nursing qualifications to university graduate level, through adding tertiary teaching qualifications. Once again, there were women within that post-graduate system who were major supports and influences in building both confidence and knowledge and introducing new possibilities. With few exceptions, such supportive transformative experiences were not experienced in paid work situations, which commonly were competitive and non-cooperative environments. These periods, though, developed skills and abilities that enabled change, while not individually being transformative. They were transitions that needed to end so that another stage could begin; a means to an end rather than an end in themselves.*

*In the farming situation, for me it was crucial to have a husband who also needed mental stimulation. Likely our conversations were different than many other*

*farming couples as we discussed philosophical ideas. But, while he could stretch himself in community positions and as a leading farmer, I seemed to be searching continually for what to me was something unknown, a mystery. I had a desperate need to think beyond farming life; a need for mental stimulation. The process of this research, then, has been enlightening, challenging and transformative in many ways. Through interviewing and speaking with farming women and men, I have on many occasions been provoked to analyse my own position, and to recognise my own conflicts and struggles. It is clear that to be different in a rural culture requires an evolving confidence and ability to instigate and nurture support, often from unlikely sources. It requires development of the skills of boundary-riding and a mix of resistance and accommodation, if one is not to become intolerably isolated from the community in which one lives (Walkerdine, 2006). If this, though, becomes an existence of mere persistence, entrapment may then self-justify over-commitment to harmful social relations that may severely deplete one personally (Petty & Ward, 2001).*

*Ultimately, to what extent are life's challenges personal maintenance and how much is transformative, is unclear. It seems maintenance of self, by definition, challenges culture in negotiating one's position. While for some it seems possible to negotiate while being totally engulfed in the culture this may be more a position of comfort, of solace. For me, the trade-off is coping with local isolations while building supportive communities outside those boundaries. It seems that in order to progress my 'self,' I am able to maintain my sense of belonging but only within a level of isolation that I see as a catalyst for change. Awareness of the place of isolation is liberating, as it enables, or more likely enforces, 'becoming' part of a wider community or series of communities. Somehow most of the isolations, e.g. social, emotional, genderised, professional, intellectual and geographic, retreat. In retrenching they become less restrictive, as other facets of life replace them. None of this, though, resolves or anchors the issues of marrying a farmer and a farm, with one's life being determined to a large extent by one's choice of life partner. It is about managing one's position within the life choices but it also entails negotiating those choices and making bold decisions. Such audacious changes are often unfathomable to others and this can then be further isolating. While, like other women, I wouldn't be living in this situation on my own, this is my home. It is where I belong and I would find it very difficult to move to an urban or city situation; not impossible, but not an*

*easy decision. But within this situation I have a need for personal challenge, for mental stimulation and to maintain a level of discomfort. It seems that struggle and conflict, while ongoing, can be energising, if played out in challenge. This, though, is a constant challenge as farmlife and farmwork, despite good personal and interpersonal intentions, always seems to assume the top position and it is immensely difficult to forge a life for one's self amongst it. The continual challenge is to prioritise some space and place for one's 'self' as it seems that 'degree of self-maintenance' is somewhat predictive of transformative events, with many different roads to transformative action eventually taken, as is disclosed by the other women in the next chapter.*

### **Conclusion: The elusive engagement of maintenance**

In conclusion, from this ethnographic study of farm women we learn that maintenance, while elusive, is a function of 'becoming' and 'belonging', concepts that are closely intermingled with the interpersonal relationship of the farm-marriage. Of the three concepts of (1) 'becoming' and belonging, (2) maintaining and belonging, and (3) transforming self and culture, that of maintenance seems the most difficult to grasp; to understand. One easily comes to know what 'becoming' entails, feels like and how it manifests itself. Likewise, one can reflect on how transforming, changing and reconstructing or reinventing is experienced through success and adversity, the indulgent and the struggles. But 'knowing' maintenance is more difficult.

Of the three data chapters, that of maintenance has been the most difficult to write; to understand and to interpret conceptually. It is clear though that maintenance is a function of a sense of belonging and of personal choice. Without these, maintenance is elusive. Issues of entrapment have emerged throughout this chapter ranging from more concrete effects, to other more elusive concerns. The former include such issues as loss of professional knowledge, skills and status, over-commitment to husband and children with unequal division of labour and the need for any off-farm work to dovetail with higher priorities of farm and family. The less known, but critical concerns, consist of more elusive concepts like legal, but not easily realisable, land-ownership; patriarchal and matriarchal control and manipulation within and between different generations. They combine with

intergenerational conflicts due to different conceptual understandings of commitment, power and choice.

Subsequent entrapment it seems is based often on over-commitment of emotional energy, attachment and loyalty that rationalises reinvestment through what may be personally indefensible persistence (Drummond, 1997; Drummond & Chell, 2001; McElhinney & Proctor, 2005; Pretty & Ward, 2001). As discussed, from the women's stories it seems clear that many of the farm-marriage relationships work best (i.e. most smoothly) when the women devote themselves to family and farm-life; best, that is, for others but not necessarily for the women their selves. It seems that often with even the best intentions farm women succumb to what farm-life imposes. Avoidance of this entrapment seems even more problematic for farm daughters than newcomers to the cultural rules and norms, as these daughters are often, in effect, entrapped by their early upbringing that often represented an intense apprenticeship.

While maintenance, then, wrongly seems to infer a period of conservation, one of continuity or even enduring existence, it is more accurately a time of preservation and of repair and upkeep, requiring support and personal affordance. It requires upholding and defending our very 'self' against contradiction rather than simply capitulating to subsistence. It is often a time of hard grind, of solid work, hidden and catalytic in process. As a catalyst, it requires production of energy without suffering permanent damage, while contributing to change.

This period of acceleration and conversion enables or influences transformation, contributing to subtle or radical change, with renewal or reconstruction. It requires reinventing the self either within or without the common culture. Often this intangible and almost unnoticed period of maintenance, of crystallisation, enables a metamorphic transformation. This superficially quiet, almost indiscernible and insignificant period, often masks a time of struggle, conflict and hidden turmoil. During this apparent period of inactivity a great metamorphosis is taking place, sometimes quickly and sometimes more slowly. Yet, there needs to be some period of turmoil for the shell to crack and the new life to emerge firstly with fragility, until by flexing its muscles the butterfly is able to fly. With change in character and appearance, the hidden, that unknown, becomes known.

The next chapter follows several farm women through their very personal processes of transitions, narrating a range of experiences that are descriptive of personal change. They indicate that by challenging social and cultural expectations,

cultural change can be influenced over time. It is clear that there is a major difference between the generations with each cohort attempting to forge change. That impetus though, is fragile in its action. Its momentum may be either afforded or inhibited by its reception from the previous generation. If each generation of women is not prepared to be transparent and practical about issues facing the next era of their farming families and communities, issues can be buried alive. This somewhat spurious attitude creates exceptionally difficult circumstances for other women and threatens the sustainability of both farming women and the family farm.

Chapter 8, in many ways, is a tribute to the women who have participated in this research either as a case for study or as an ethnographic participant contributing through a range of discourse and engagement within the cultural field. These women generously tell their stories of transformation to add meaning to how we know and see the lives of farm women in New Zealand.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### TRANSFORMING SELF AND CULTURE – CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES THROUGH ARDUOUS PERSONAL ODYSSEYS

*To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality (hooks, 2000, p. 110).*

Chapters 6 and 7 have presented data analysis as a means of building, clarifying, illustrating (Campbell, 2005) and arguing the case towards understanding farm women's changing subjectivities: through 'becoming' and 'belonging' while seeking self-maintenance. This chapter grants the women voice to express their personal transformations in ways checked in previous chapters due to word limitations. While presenting the women's stories as a celebration of their hard-fought transformative actions, it adds to transparency and fidelity in honouring the methodologies and theories of approach argued in Chapters 4 and 5 that are critical to ethnographic and feminist research. It strives to illustrate clearly what is being claimed, while telling understandable, absorbing stories (ibid, 2005; Etherington, 2004) of the women's ways of being. I deliberated about the positioning of this chapter. The women's narratives could have been presented before the other chapters, and thus used as sources of data and context. Yet, the narratives are more than that. They provide accounts that need to be understood through considerations of becoming and sustaining of selves by these and other women. Also, and importantly, this chapter stands as a tribute to the women who participated in this research, in a range of ways, thereby contributing to new understandings of the farm women's place and struggles in effecting change within their specific culture. The women generously tell their stories of very personal challenge, radical change and transformation, adding new meaning to how we know and see the lives of farm women in New Zealand.

## **Transforming self and culture**

Early in the interviews it became very obvious that there were major issues facing these farm women. Four of the first five women interviewed wept while telling their stories. Some of these personal conflicts went back twenty or more years, yet were as acute and hurtful as if they were much more recent. It became clear that these women had buried issues ‘alive’, in their need to be strong and resilient facing the difficulties that they had dealt with in their lives. While they were stoic and uncomplaining, often silent tears rolled down their cheeks as they recounted their stories. As their ‘herstories’ progressed, accounts pierced with pain, prolonged periods of ‘coping’ with their plight and emerging stories of revival and renewal often gave insight into chains of dependency, tensions and contests in striving for survival in their lives. Some were still in the midst of dealing with their struggles, but others had moved on, while yet others seemed to be awaiting the next wave of personal conflict. Many described times of desolation that they faced in a variety of ways in transforming their lives. This chapter follows some of these women throughout these transformations in seeking understanding of the meanings of individual agencies and personal subjective change, alongside cultural and social influences and constraints.

It seems that a void or sense of emptiness in one’s life, if faced openly, can be a catalyst for personal transformation. For some, this transformation manifests as a result of an accumulation of dis-satisfaction, sense of purposelessness, lack of sense of value and repressive loss of self-confidence. Many women in this study described a set of depressive symptoms sometimes clinically diagnosed as depression, while others found intolerable the realisation of underutilisation of their skills and abilities as expressed in “I just don’t like to waste time”, “I’m better than this” and “It’s lack of mental stimulation”. It is clear, though, that a point of struggle with prolonged depressive symptoms, conflict or tension often catapults the individual into action. They are forced to act for their own humanness. It seems unfortunate that it is by reaching a point of despair that, increasingly, it seems, farm women leave their marriage in seeking new possibilities for their self. Ironically, what the women often are seeking are quite basic requests – to have fun, to have holidays, to have time for their ‘self’, to be challenged and mentally stimulated, to be appreciated and valued and to be a person in their own right. Living vicariously through their husband’s career, while acceptable for most in the short-term, seems unsustainable over time.

Partial participation (helping) or “getting a hobby” are likewise not sustainable over a period of twenty, thirty or forty plus years. These women often cannot see a way to disentangle their identity or to leave their work (the farm) without leaving their marriage.

### **Transformation as contesting ‘self’**

Transformation is a concept more often identified by the women participants through milestones and ‘rites of passage’ rather than with adversity or success and yet previous research (Allan, 2002, 2005a) pinpointed these latter effects as contributing most significantly to learning. Transformative periods identified by these farm women included getting married and ‘going farming’ along with ‘having children’, travelling overseas and leaving their known lives for the great ‘unknown’ of farming. It stood out though that for many, major life transformations were forced on them through a particular personal struggle. These major changes were agentic in action, although often as a result of social and cultural impositions. On the surface at least, it seems some were more able to challenge the constraints and restraints that bound them but, in reality, it took considerable struggle and conflict to win a sense of freedom. Transformation, it seems, is manifested in the process that leads to major decision. This chapter records several personal accounts as told by the women themselves. The cases here depict both those who have successfully transformed their selves and those who are struggling for this position. The continuity of transformation is discussed where, as one reaches that point which has been strived for, another distant position is glimpsed as life spirals onwards. Through personal transformations expectations in both social and cultural communities are questioned and modified, sometimes subtly and at times more dramatically. These cases illustrate issues long since recognised for urban ‘wives’ where the two-person career has “the effect of ‘de-railing’ a wife from pursuing her own career and diverts her energies into her husband’s [career]” (Papanek, 1973, p.852; Finch 1983). Here, however, the study goes further by bringing home the reality that this perspective, exposed twenty to thirty years (and more) ago, is currently continuing to ‘de-rail’ farm ‘wives’ as their mental wellness is impacted upon through a wide range of isolations and intellectual confinements. It seems, as one television reporter put it to me, that this research may be about to “drag farming kicking and screaming into the 1970s”. But, for now, a selection of the

women participants, tell stories of their courageous challenges in transforming their selves.

### **Individual stories of personal struggles towards transformative change**

Each of the women tell unique stories of transformative experiences although there are many common issues, some inter-generational and some intra-generational. While some younger women (like Rachel) are determined to control their destiny, to some degree at least, by limiting the time or extent to which they are tied to the isolations of the farm-marriage and its entangled identities, others have left their trajectory more to destiny itself. This destiny if unchallenged commonly revolves around the needs and wants of the farming husband and subsequent cultural expectations. As discussed earlier, Rachel is a strong negotiator who is keeping the debate of her future career and future needs to the forefront of their decisions as a family. Sarah, although only five years older than Rachel, approached her farm-marriage more traditionally, at least initially, when she married onto her husband's family farm.

#### **Sarah - 35 years old, rural-town raised**

Sarah was just twenty-one when she married her farming husband (Mike) with whom she has raised three young children. They lived for the early years on the family farm, which entailed the father, son and both wives. While Mike's stepmother was young, realistic and no threat to Sarah, the family situation was a challenge. There was not enough money in the farm to support two families and so Sarah went into town to work so that they "drew very little off the farm". While she had one very good friend, she felt like:

I was the black sheep of the district I think. All the other young women tried to keep up with the Jones' ... I just didn't worry about the cliques. [But] I used to resent how they always seemed to have an overseas holiday every year and I used to resent the hell out of that. We were just struggling and I would say to Mike 'why can they have a trip away and we can't?' ... But the community over there was real close - there were good parts to that too and bad, because I wasn't a local so I didn't fit in as one of them.

This proved to be a problem when Sarah had mental health problems since she had already learned not to trust the confidences of the local community. As she tells it,

There was only 13 months between the first two [children] and with the second one I got depressed. I suffered silently for a very long time with that. So I sort of cut a lot of people off then. There was a bit of both, I cut them off and they stepped back from me too. ... And Mike just thought I'd get over it. Well he buried his head a bit – he thought 'oh look out she's off again but she'll get over it.' And even *he* didn't do anything about it.

When she eventually sought help Mike refused to attend counselling with her as requested:

He thought 'It's not my problem'. And he backed off big time over that. He went real anti and wouldn't have anything to do with this counsellor because it wasn't his problem. And yeah Mike's family was really good. There was one day that I appeared down at the main farmhouse and I said 'if I go home I'm going to do something stupid, I can't go home' and his [step]mother went out and got him and said 'right you're having the day off, go and look after your wife'.

This account of Mike's reaction concurs with other women's stories of telling husbands and mothers about their severe despondencies and depression which were not taken seriously. These conditions seem to be seen as the woman's problem and something she should just pull herself out of. While Sarah's depression manifested post-natally it is clear that a range of isolations also contributed. Although Sarah described herself as a strongly social person, she was proud and didn't want anyone to know her personal situation. Her one friend was a 'super woman' and contributed to the pressure Sarah felt trying to live up to her friends standards and to meeting cultural expectations. With help from professionals, she "worked things out" for herself. Soon they had three children but the family farm was proving uneconomic for two families and there were issues with authority between the two generations. To relieve the situation, Mike and Sarah moved away temporarily to seek opportunities. While they were away, though, a decision was made for the family farm to be sold and for Mike to go it alone, but with no financial help. Although Mike was a partner in the family farm, "we more or less walked away with nothing". This caused a huge family rift with lawyers involved as Mike tried to be recompensed for 18 years of farming in partnership. However, in the end they were cut adrift and set about starting over again. This required Sarah to work milking cows, firstly taking the children to the dairy shed and shutting them in the office with toys, something at which Sarah is now horrified.

Sarah and Mike moved regularly from one dairy farm to another trying to move up the ladder towards a goal of buying their own farm. This has proved elusive. Sarah worked hard on the various farms, at times employing a nanny for the children as her hours were so long. During this period she had an intermittent battle with depression. She described huge issues with workloads and with isolation from other women. She didn't find it easy to make friends and didn't feel accepted into one very strong dairy community. While happier in her new community, she still has no real friends. In the twelve months previous to the initial interview though, Sarah had been negotiating to go out to work.

I really wanted to do something for me. I don't know if it is that the kids are getting older and they don't need me as much and – maybe it is hitting 35 too that doesn't help. I went through a stage where I felt I'd never done anything and that was at about 33. I'd never had a career - I'd never done anything that I could say *I* did. And then I tried to get into the police force at the end of last year and found out in February that I wasn't acceptable due to my history of depression. I was really keen for that (laughs). Mike wasn't keen – he went along with me, [but] I think with his fingers crossed. So then I thought, 'well I'm not going to be able to do that, so what *can* I do?' Because I didn't want to be fulltime here [on-farm] so I just saw this job advertised. They were looking for casual carers and I thought, 'oh I don't know whether I can do that or not'. So I went for a look and thought 'oh god I can't do that (laughs). I can't shower people and oh' – and I thought 'well I'll give it a go' and I love it. Now I'm fulltime - it is good and I've still got time to be here doing the background office stuff and kids stuff.

Sarah went on to describe maintaining the family and farm household along with other farm responsibilities and off-farm work – very accurately, the third shift. She described how her off-farm work has added interest both to her life and to their marriage relationship. It seems that Mike goes along with it because it makes her happier. And she says:

It gives us something to talk about. You know, I was getting really stale. I'd be here and he'd come in and would say 'what are you doing' and I'd say 'nothing'. 'Who have you been talking to?' 'Oh, nobody'. And we just had nothing to talk about. And I really didn't like it. So now he'll come inside and tell me who's doing what and I'll tell him who's doing what and he'll say 'ooh. I couldn't do that he'll say'.

So Sarah's work has given her an individual identity although still entangled with farm and family. She feels a new found sense of esteem and value, while the work is satisfying, challenging and stimulating. But, interestingly, this work (in a mostly

female workplace) has not relieved Sarah of genderised isolation. Sarah believes she really identifies more with men than women and this masculinised outlook on life seems to isolate her in her new workplace. As she disclosed:

I don't like working with women. They bitch and fight and back stab and I just don't like that. You're there to do a job if you ask me and get in and do your job and you don't enter into the politics. That's the only part I don't like. It's the bitchiness.

With some contradiction, though, she says that it is the "social aspect" that she likes.

You get to mix in different circles and learn about other people and, I don't know, I think it's more the fact that it still comes back to Mike and I. I'm not bored. I'm not stale. I'm yeah stronger with having that other aspect. Yeah. Cos we - I got lazy - it was easier not to talk to him - not to say anything, sort of thing. You know 'I've got nothing worth saying so I won't bother'. And say Mum rang up and he'd say 'what did she have to say' and I'd say 'nothing'. (Laughs) I was hopeless.

Her mental wellness is much better now that she is working and she has ceased medication. But it is helpful to be working "because you're not sitting around looking at the four walls". Sarah recognises that if she didn't trade-off housework she wouldn't be able to be working off-farm. "Probably not, I'd be spending my whole blimmin' life doing housework!" But when she comes home from work at around mid-night the housework is still waiting for her. "Oh yeah, the dishes are never done or anything. The tea dishes are all still on the bench but that's life - you just do it in the morning." But she recognises that if she hadn't made that change it would be hard to come home and see the mess. "Oh god yeah, I'd be doing my nana all the time (laughs)." So, while Sarah is working fulltime, the division of farm household labour remains traditional. In addition, although Sarah now identifies as a carer she is still well involved on-farm. As she says:

Well, yeah. I rear the calves and do the herd records and there's always farm employment contracts to do and you know there's always something. Mike and I have still got our company so there's still all the books and stuff for that to do. It is damn near a fulltime job keeping up with all that! ... And I could still be on the farm fulltime. And that's a choice that I'm very lucky that Mike will *let* me make. He's never, ever been one to say 'right you've got to do this or you've got to stay home' and I think that living through depression has put a (different) slant on him (laughs). Yeah, because when I'm not happy I'm no good.

But there are still social pressures to cope with, since her mother thinks she should be home for the children as *she* was. And as Sarah recalled “she [Sarah’s mother] said ‘oh, you can’t do that you’re needed too much on the farm’ (laughs). And I really can’t sort of tie myself up too much, because I am still needed here sometimes.” Once again Sarah describes the third shift phenomenon supported by patriarchal farming culture, within which she feels *lucky* that Mike *lets* her work off-farm. While this independence is important to Sarah and to her mental wellness it is still viewed as privilege. It is enlightening too that she says thoughtfully that if she had her time over again, she wouldn’t get married or have children. She would travel and have a career probably as a policewoman, “Yeah, I’d really like that.”

Sarah identifies her struggle to understand herself, and her position within her farm-marriage, as critical to her sense of self. It is clear that working off-farm and achieving something for her self (work that her husband couldn’t do) adds to her changing subjectivity and personal esteem. It reveals previously unknown possibilities through knowing, learning and risk-taking. She has grown in confidence and feels valued. Working off-farm better fulfills her needs although maintaining the farm entanglement to a large degree. While her initial depressive symptoms seemed related to having young children (i.e. postnatal depression) it also seems undoubtedly linked to a range of isolations. Her transformative actions are provoked it seems, by this ‘black hole’ or void which many farm women reported as being a constant challenge. While more research is needed into possible connections it seems there are inter-relationships between severe unhappiness or depressive symptoms, isolations and lack of fulfilment. Counselling, which Sarah received when dealing with her depression, contributed insight into her personal needs. She continues to use these sets of skills to understand ‘self’ and personal empowerment. Interestingly, other women reported depression ceasing to be a problem after they left their farm or farm-marriage, which indicates isolations, issues of entrapment and disintegrative identity as being linked to depressive manifestations, an area identified for further research.

### **Anne – 50 years old, rural-town raised**

Anne is a fifty year old woman who married and went farming with her husband in the 1970s. Her early days have been described in earlier chapters as she farmed with her husband, in what seemed to be a ‘fully participant’ capacity. This perception was

to be challenged, though, as life changed when her husband was diagnosed with a life threatening illness in his mid-forties. He was a man with a great sense of humour and his way was to laugh his way through it. After all, that's much more acceptable to people than showing other emotions, especially in a rural culture where men are men and death is a daily occurrence. Anne's response was to throw herself, fully, into creating a huge and quite amazing garden, which grew to the extent that bus tours would call for a garden walk. Her garden was well-known, as was her love for gardening. Her children were away from home now forging their own lives. Jim was a very social person who always had friends (men, in particular) calling. Anne loved having these people about and while she rarely took part in the discussions about farming, farm dogs and life in general, she felt part of it while providing food and cups of tea. She was just happy to have people around and she often mused about how lucky they were to have such good friends. Jim's health went 'up and down' and Anne reflected to me about how she hated going to the [small town] supermarket because people would "always ask 'how's Jim?' and 'how's the garden?'" but "nobody asked how I was". She talked about this with Jim and with his usual humorous response he suggested she put a sign about her neck saying, "Jim's okay and the garden's okay, thanks." But the sign was there that Anne's needs were not being met.

After several years the inevitable happened. Jim was just having routine tests when his condition deteriorated and he died quite suddenly. Anne was devastated as she had lived her life around her marriage to Jim and their farm. The initial response was to lease the property and to keep ownership of it. This proved problematic because, although there had been some years of illness, Jim and Anne had never discussed what she might do if, or when, he died. Anne said, they "just somehow always thought he would beat it" even though realistically the writing was on the wall. Anne never had the management and financial knowledge to organise this change. Her daughter took care of the financial side of things for her, but management issues remained a problem. She found farming men generally (and male professional advisors in particular) never gave her the information or 'know how' that she required. As Anne said, "They would often say they would get back to me, but then they never did. And I hated ringing them all the time." With some advice she leased the farm for two years but when that came to an end she was back to the same problem again. She never had the propositional knowledge or the dispositional ability

to carry the necessary conversations. In fact, she was not as informed as she had thought she was and she was very lonely. She felt very isolated. The callers had stopped and she was missing their company. She was particularly missing the company of the men. She came to realise that those who she had thought were ‘their’ friends were in fact ‘his’ friends. He was the social one. She mused:

I didn’t like parties but Jim was a great party person. I loved people just popping in and I was happy just to cook for them but I didn’t like inviting people in and feeling like I had to have everything all right in the house and Jim just loved parties. But after he died all of a sudden I liked parties. It was just to go out and meet people.

So she was lonely, she had lost her sense of value as a farmer as her management knowledge had been found wanting. She had lost her interest in farming and her garden now seemed pointless and unimportant. She reflected, “No, because you had no one to share it with. And I used to think, ‘what am I doing all this gardening for?’ because I had no one to share it with really but it did keep me busy after he died.” She proceeded with a major development in her garden making a small lake and planting it out but, although the garden was transitional work, she no longer had her heart in it. And she excused her abandonment, by those she had considered friends, as busyness although with some hurt and confusion tinged with embarrassment:

They’d give me a ring sometime or whatever and - everyone is sort of busy. Yes, the odd woman – women wouldn’t come and visit, I mean they were all sort of busy – I suppose women have visited before. But over the years it was always the men. Well it was farm workers who would come out or there were always stock agents or vets or there always seemed to be someone calling in and but I suppose I didn’t ever used to have friends. I suppose most people were more Jim’s friends than mine because he was really the social one and you know I would go out to garden club or whatever and I suppose most people who would generally come would be more to look at the garden, probably rather than to actually visit me.

During this part of the interview Anne came to admission that she had never really had her own friends or in fact real personal interests. The garden was something that filled in time but had no real personal value alone on the farm. Anne described an upsetting incident where she heard back through the grapevine that the wife of one of ‘their’ friends was saying that Anne was “desperate for men” and “wearing her heart on her sleeve” and describing her as a threat. She was experiencing, not only abandonment from those she had viewed as ‘their’ friends but criticism, in her grief.

She experienced a gender divide without Jim as she needed advice from neighbouring men and other 'friends' but with no man in the house it then became a male and female issue where she came under suspicion by some female partners with people thinking "something may be was going on". This gossiping upset and further isolated her and she was very lonely, so she decided that she needed to go out and make friends. She went to a neighbouring provincial city where she:-

Unashamedly went to a singles group actually and other women would say to me 'I'm not here looking for a partner I'm just here for the company and enjoying it, I'm not here to find a partner'. And I would say 'well I am and I'm not ashamed to say I am' – you know I needed someone [male company].

Anne has met someone who she sees as "a special friend". While they keep their own independence, they go on holidays together and they ring each other a couple of times a day, they have meals together, go on picnics and are really good soulmates. But she made the point that through finding herself without male or female friends she had to go out of her comfort zone and become a party person, which was not her known way, and to actively seek friends or a particular friend. Anne then realised that she no longer had a place on her farm or in the community and so:

I went home and I thought, (and I had met Ben at this stage and I was enjoying his company) and I thought, 'why don't I shift to town?' – So, I made up my mind just like that and came and found this wee place and I thought 'ohhh, I don't know how I will be in town' but I just love it now.

The farm was sold and she now is living in a small city and is "busy every day doing something". She maintains her small garden, she attends social clubs and fitness clubs, she goes line dancing, which she says is good for her brain, fitness and concentration. She goes on holidays and if Ben, her new partner, doesn't want to go, "I just ask him once and if he's not interested I just ask a female friend if she wants to go." She recognises that she has become a different sort of person as a widow - she has transformed her life. She has become more social, more independent and quietly confident. She is happy. As she said,

No I didn't need it at all [the myriad of activities] when Jim was – when I had Jim. I really only need one special person – like Ben is so special and its just wonderful just having his company but yes I suppose if it hadn't been for [her club activities]. I love all that - I can't stay here [at home] all day, I haven't got enough to do. I mean there are things I could do but you only do the things you want to do. I prefer more to just go out and do just what I want to.

Anne has changed so dramatically and is living a life now that she could never have imagined. It is clear that her love for farming was dependent on Jim and *his* needs, even to the point of thinking his friends were hers also. These on the whole proved not to be sustaining friendships and more accurately were only a function of her relationship with Jim. She is now having her emotional and social needs met and her many activities are meeting her need for mental stimulation. In transforming she has 'become' once again and is going through a new period of maintenance where she is seeing that her needs are met. In telling her daughter that she is only available to baby-sit when it fits in with her own life, it seems she has learned from her experiences that her own needs are to be prioritised rather than always meeting others' needs. While she has a relationship with a new male partner she ensures that he does not limit her activities and she is avoiding total engulfment in his life. Maybe for the first time in a long time she is being her own person.

Anne's transformation was enforced by life-changes following her husband's death, without which it is likely she would have continued life engulfed in her husband's identity. While this reinvention of 'self' was socially propelled, it required a determined and focused personal agency to deliberately remake her own life against a social and cultural contingent steeped in criticism and gossip and lacking support or understanding. Anne displayed strength of agency not easily identifiable in her farming life-work and work-life but which, nonetheless, welled up from her inner self to transform her subjectively. Coping with a particularly insensitive form of 'policing' by other women, doubtlessly contributed to this but she is now a confident, independent and social 'being' rather than reliant on one dominant relationship for her sense of self. It seems she is self-regulated and self-verified for the first time; she recognises and likes the person she knows as herself.

### **Louise – 35 years old, farm daughter, raised on a farm**

Louise is a 35 year old woman of a younger generation than Anne. We met Louise through the earlier data chapters as a young woman who struggled on her husband's extended farming family. While she wanted to be fully involved in the practical side of farming, this did not fit the family agenda especially that of her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Her contributions to the farming operation were not recognised or given value. She felt invisible and desperately lacked any sense of belonging. From the

constant friction and conflict she was driven to the point where she had a “cat fight” with her sister-in-law, and had a heated exchange with her father-in-law, which alerted her to the miserable state of her health and wellness. In this highly emotional and desperate state, ultimately she left her three young children with their father and literally drove off into the night not knowing what she would do or where she would end up. She reported having disintegrated into a person she no longer knew and for whom she feared. She had reached a point of incapacity, in which she could no longer function within her marriage or as a mother to her children.

With no place to call home, Louise imposed on her sister and brother-in-law. While they didn’t agree with her actions, they accepted her decision and supported her over the initial weeks. As Louise put it, “the day I left was the day I had to start fulltime working, you know, because I didn’t have any income and you can’t live without money these days.” She had 18 months experience ‘relief milking’ cows and had experience at raising calves, so she thought:

... Oh, this is something I can do. So I started off relief milking for a couple of months and then a neighbour around the road [from where she was living] offered me a fulltime job and I went to work for him. I was working 12 days on and 2 days off and that was the first calving I had done – 15 hour days and I was so tired. But I was coming home at half past seven at night, having a shower and falling asleep on the couch without eating. I lost a lot of weight but not a day would go by without thinking about the kids. I had two days-off a fortnight and I spent those two days on-the-road getting the kids from A to B. Chris would quite often meet me halfway and I would get the kids that way on a Friday night and then on Sunday night we would have to meet again [halfway]. It was an hour and a half driving for each of us so it was quite a lot of travelling and I was still tired. But then I decided that – ‘I can do this but I just need to be closer to the kids’ so that was when I [shifted closer]. I didn’t have a problem with my job up there; I loved the people. I actually got out and had a bit of a life. You know we had a laugh. We laughed and laughed – it was a serious time of the year but I really had quite a good working environment to be in up there.

While she was working hard and working and living with “five blokes” she seemed to “laugh and laugh” to make up in some way for all the miserable times she had been having in the previous five years. As she said, “life had been very serious and morbid” with drought conditions adding pressures to her farming-family situation. She agreed that the family farm had been a big influence on her leaving, “huge, a huge amount”. It caused major tension and conflict and in the end the marriage couldn’t cope with it, or more accurately she couldn’t cope with it. Now, nearly two

years later, she says “silly really, it was really silly because now that I am missing those kids so much – I’m missing their day-to-day things, which is hurting me. I’m pigheaded.” Louise recognises though that she was depressed and she wasn’t really capable of making any other decision. She needed some space for her own sanity. The extended farming-family situation had been noxious for her, alienating her from her very self to the point where she couldn’t recognise her ‘self’. But she still said with some regret:

But the farming thing ... If only you’d been valued a bit more, you know, because the farm was part of our life and we very rarely got away from it with the droughts and we never had a lot of money. With farming you have a good year and then you have a drought and you have a bad year and the income’s not there. If you don’t have the income you can’t have an off-farm life, socialising. But ... I always felt on the outer. ... The farm partnership was his mother, his father, his brother and him... Men do their days work farming and then they switch off. Whereas women - I found that I was out there every day doing it and then, at night, I was coming home doing the motherly, wifely thing as well and not valued or appreciated.

While it would seem that to leave her children behind with their father may have been a major source of conflict, in some ways it wasn’t.

I felt then - I knew in my heart - that they would be better off there. They had their home, they were where they had grown up – their farm. They had their friends, their school, what they knew was important to them. They had their house. I didn’t know where I was going. Because of my upbringing, because of my background, I didn’t want to be a solo mother who rented a house in town with neighbours right near, doing nothing. You know. I’m a worker. I wanted to be out working with animals, or whatever. I couldn’t see myself doing that [being a beneficiary]. You see where I’m coming from? Because I don’t know where I’m going I thought the children are better to have that same flow with their home, their farm, their pets and their friends and I felt like a lost woman. I know it hasn’t been easy for the oldest one. And it hasn’t been easy - not for me either. I’m just floating with life at the moment from day-to-day, really. I have to work to earn money to try to keep afloat but ...

While Louise was in a relationship at the time of interview, she knew that it wasn’t the one for her. She knew she had to make a decision about that.

[Having another relationship] is not the reason I left my kids and am floating. I’m telling you more than I’ve told anyone else probably – but he’s company – yeah. I was by myself and he’s been here a while and its horrible but I throw myself into my work and then I work and sleep and work and sleep. When I was still with Chris I was trying to please him by helping him on the farm, trying to help doing things with the kids, and I don’t think I did a lot for

myself. So I didn't do much for myself when I was married and when I made the call to leave I thought I was doing it for myself but I am back in a hole now. All I do is work and 'peg out' and .... I've been away 20 months and really, for myself, I'm not a lot better off than what I was. That's what I mean; it all comes back to me floating through life now. Umm, I can be honest here now can I – you won't say anything to anyone? I'm very tempted to go back. I'm missing the kids so much. [*How do you feel about Chris?*]. I do miss him! (Crying) It took me a long time to realise it but saying that, I have to go back for the right reason. I have to go back not just for the kids but I have to go back for me. And I'm concerned that if I go back we've got the big family-farm thing again. And that is a big stumbling block. I would love to be able to say 'I'll come back but we've got to go somewhere else – we've got to make a break and do something for ourselves'. But I can't do that to him - he's put a lot of time and effort into the farm.

... I hurt him a lot. I took off, I left him with a lot of responsibility and I've tried my best. I've tried to ease the load every now and then by taking the kids away for a time and so he would have some time out for himself. ... But then I'm hesitant. What happens when we get back to everyday life? The farm, the family - the family farm thing comes back in my mind again. It's so suffocating. That had a lot to do with our breakdown. Then you've got the appreciation thing again. Is it horrible to say something like that? When I'm in a relationship here with another man but I'm not committed to it? I love my job here. I just can't have it all ways. I can't have my job and my family. And that upsets me (crying). If I could have got Chris to come and work on a dairy farm with me and bring the kids you know it would be – but he won't do that and I can't really say I will only come back if you come to me – I can't have it on my terms – I can't have everything I want. Chris said 'I'll be quite honest – I'm sorry my family had a lot to do with our breakdown.' But they are his family and if the problem was my family I would have trouble with it too. Family is family. ... At one stage we looked at maybe getting out and going somewhere else but then how would I have felt if it had been my family-farm?

While Louise worries about how her decision impacted on everyone, including herself, she seems genuinely to understand her estranged family's perspective. But the reality for her is that she needs medication for depression that helps her survive, to continue living, albeit in considerable misery. She is completing formal qualifications in dairying and she loves her work but she appears fragmented: a broken person who can't see how 'she can have it all'. It is more than a dilemma; it is a crisis. She feels that she is at a watershed and is burdened by the enormity of possible decisions. As this research has illuminated, it seems that often such a tumultuous period is essential for these women's transformation. Louise though is in a fragile state, coping merely through working absurdly hard, taking medication and blocking out the pain for short periods. It is questionable whether she is in a sufficient state of wellness to transform,

to make the changes necessary. Her estranged life has not been one of metamorphosis but rather one of “floating”. She has existed in a transitory state for a prolonged period. The entanglement of the family-farm with each party having very different needs seems to block resolution. She can’t go back and yet she’s having trouble going forward; in effect she can’t ‘go home’ as she doesn’t know where ‘home’ is. One of the other women, Kate, told of a period of fifteen years where she felt in a similar state of limbo while existing inside her farm-marriage. This is a concerning state of play where farm ownership-structures and farming-culture can have such a pernicious effect on these women’s lives; when to leave their ‘workplace’ they need to leave their marriage and in Louise’s case, her children. Both these women, like others, said that they believed if they were not farming they would still be married.

At the time of writing Louise and Chris are attempting to incorporate her work-life apart from their home-life and farm-life. They are seeking to refuel their interpersonal relationships as a family, and as husband and wife. They have been apart for two years and come close to divorcing and, yet, they still see some hope. This confirms stories of other farming couples spoken to who have divorced. They commonly say that they believe that they would still be married, if they weren’t farming. It seems from a number of women spoken to in this research that if men need to choose between their farm and their marriage often the marriage loses out. Maybe this is because they ‘know’ the farm but by that stage see their marriage as an unknown risk with a wife who is daring to have an opinion and to state conditions. All of a sudden their love seems conditional but these conditions by the women are usually for their own mental wellness. So for Louise transformative action seems elusive although she has been through huge changes over the last two years.

*(Post-script: During the following year, Louise’s husband made the decision to lease his part of the family farm and to work on a dairy farm alongside Louise. They are living with their children as a family once again. While it is early days yet, they seem very hopeful of resolution.)*

While Louise’s decision to leave the farm-marriage was socially and culturally levered, it seems that by exercising agency and taking huge risks in leaving her family, she has given them (as a couple and as a nuclear family) a chance. There is now a prospect of having a co-relationship rather than being shackled by the restraints of the extended family farm inter-relationships and consequential engulfment. By her actions, she has de-regulated both her own identity and also that of her family. It

seems that going through the process of reflection for this study, clarified issues for her and therefore for her family. This was something that counselling had not achieved. It seems, though, that it required Louise taking a bold and somewhat extreme stand. It required her living an emotionally and physically draining existence over a prolonged period of more than two years in order to extricate both her and her husband from the shackles and noxious effects of the inter-relationships, bound in the extended family farm. By battling a sense of entrapment and refusing many 'side-bets' Louise seems to have neutralised some of the identity regulations and matriarchal policing so common in extended farming families. By transforming her self and her farm-marriage, albeit requiring huge personal investment and risk, Louise hopefully has contributed greatly by challenging cultural expectations and forging change.

### **Bronwyn – 48 years old, raised in a large European city**

Bronwyn, as we have discussed throughout the previous chapters, met her farming husband while travelling around New Zealand. What was to be a holiday turned into life living on a farm and raising two children. Her very different European background meant huge changes, which were eased by her mother-in-law who was perceptive and a great advocate for her farming daughters-in-law, their needs and their lives. Over the years Bronwyn had several moves from one farm to another as she and her husband made the most of a range of opportunities to progress in their various farming enterprises. Throughout the early years she worked on the farm, as she was needed, while raising her family. They were successful in several innovative business ventures prior to the decision to look for a bigger farm with more opportunities. This took them to a period when, while developing a new much larger farm, they were obstructed by the need to await planning consents. As a consequence, they decided to lease their land for two years. In her words, Bronwyn felt at "a bit of a loose end" and she "didn't like wasting time". Their youngest child was about to be sent away to boarding school and she felt a need to resist this disruption to her life and to the child's. She began to negotiate a period living with her child in the city and "doing something for herself". As she put it, she wanted to "remain a mother for a bit longer, remain involved in one of the children's lives in a way that I couldn't here and the other thing was to get a tertiary qualification." As she reflected, she was looking

for “personal satisfaction, I suppose, and probably a bit of regret that I never did anything like that at a time when most people did.” She reflected that she had enjoyed lectures in business law when she was working in Europe prior to marriage. She recalled a business-law course:

... A woman gave this lecture and I thought that’s what I should have done. At that stage that’s what really clicked and it’s the only time that I’ve ever felt like that. To have done a law degree and related it back to the whole area of business would be my ultimate choice. There are some areas of law that wouldn’t interest me at all but that business side of it [would] - and if I had been able to go to university and been in a city [rather than on a farm] I would have done law.

But she considered that a law degree through a university wouldn’t fit with her child’s schooling hours so she chose a business-teaching course. In her words, “So I chose what I did out of what I could choose.”

This new life living in the city, while her husband remained on the farm commuting at weekends, had social benefits also. She made a “really good friend, a *really* good friend, which is nice because we still keep in touch”. She felt a growth in confidence from being in a supportive ‘community of interest’, “in a way that I have never before”. She mused:

But it made me realise that I could write quite well, questioning. I enjoyed being a student. I liked the freedom that I got that I haven’t had for a while, (and I could always go back to the farm) ... I could walk to the shops and get the bread on a daily basis. Just being able to walk – that’s always been a bugbear for me – not being able to walk [to places]. Initially I would walk up to the sheepyards and back just for the sake of getting out and walking, getting a break. Umm – no just being in an academic community really, and just nice that you could call at people’s homes.

She shared confidences with her new woman friend, who was having marriage difficulties, as they met up and travelled to College together.

We met up at the end of the road everyday and biked together and talked. That was a woman’s thing – it was good. So it was a nice thing to do for myself, and it was goal driven. So, as we learned slowly about our families and ... having a two hour lecture and a coffee after that. And so we had a common goal getting this course sussed. So that was the daily structure if you like.

Others were completing the qualification “for their jobs or out of necessity”. During this time (in her own words) she came to realise that: “I was privileged to be doing it for the reason I was doing it. Not just for that course but the whole experience ... and

having the support of [the other woman] and that was quite interesting.” She had a very different life renting a house and spending weekends in the city with her husband commuting. Those weekends, then, were not farming-oriented, but included meeting new friends and renewing Nick’s old university acquaintances, while enjoying the benefits of what the city had to offer.

This bold move to the city as a form of self-maintenance could be considered quite a daring and courageous thing to do; to make the decision to pack up and go away from the farm and family home for a planned period of two years. It carried with it some risks. As Bronwyn said:

Yes! Well, once again, I probably didn’t realise how risky it was before I did it, yeah. And I took a while to realise, really. Maybe I never did quite understand the other side – you know people (including Nick) asking ‘why are you doing this?’ I knew exactly why I was doing it and everyone should understand that too and that’s probably a bit naïve but, yes, as I say, we did get through it. But there are others who didn’t and certainly on a few occasions I sort of wondered am I putting too much [pressure] on my relationship? It was hard to actually put into words what you wanted - well I could put it into words but they weren’t necessarily words that were understood.

But Bronwyn did that for herself. She wanted the tertiary qualification but it was something more than that. She wanted to prove something to herself. She wanted to have a certain amount of freedom while being at a stage in her life when it seemed necessary to reassert or reinvent her ‘self’ in some way. She reflected:

... But it comes back to this sort of part of me that hates wasting time and not having an end result to something. And having the farm leased, we both lost our direction. There wasn’t much to do on the farm, not much to do at all and to me it was just a waste of time. And here was my child going off to school and ‘why on earth was I here’. And [the new farm] was very remote, more remote than it is now that we are properly set up with staff.

While Bronwyn felt that her husband and others were struggling to understand why she was making these choices, they seemed still basically supportive.

Yes nobody said ‘no, don’t go’. Nick might have liked to have said, ‘don’t’. I think he just felt threatened by it, like ‘where is it leaving me’ ‘was it [something to do with him?] ...’ but I mean my mother-in-law for example was supportive of it. I remember Nick’s aunt saying ‘oh it’s great’ – they were supportive. I think it was more Nick. It was just a [tough] personal time for him – you know. ‘Is this life not good enough?’ You know and mid-life stuff too, I guess. And he had to stay here and do things and spend more time alone. But, if the truth be known, that whole experience made old city acquaintances

of Nick's, into really good friends. One couple, who just lived around the corner [from the rented city home], and three other friends, all come down [to the farm now for visits]. And we have an aspect to our lives now that is broader than if I hadn't done that. And it's carried through. There are rewards in doing anything different; it enriches life. I mean, Nick, - this is quite personal, isn't it? - But Umm, I would have liked Nick to have something that really interested him off the farm too. But he never has hugely ... Yes, sometimes I think you can be too dependent on the other person and I am stronger than him in that way too. I have always had a strong self-belief.

This self-belief was reinforced by her considerable success at her academic course as she "got good grades" which she found very satisfying and confidence-building. She discovered new strengths, which she has been able to put into practice in her farming and community life.

I feel good about that. I'm quite confident that I can string words together reasonably well, now. From twenty-odd years of never working much off-farm, just being a parent with involvement on the farm, to discover new abilities. So it's given me a 'grounding' for my involvement in environmental politics and other [public issues]... I mean, I think we are all the same, [that is] guilty of wanting to be recognised and that's been something lacking.

Now, though, she is finding limited openings for using her business-education training with some of the teaching-work proving to be less satisfying than she had hoped. So she is left wondering "what are the avenues now? I don't know umm I don't know..." While it is somewhat by default, Bronwyn has chosen to return to farm involvement taking up the major responsibility for both stock and financial management of their farming enterprise. While she feels that business law would be her first choice of career, she is getting a sense of satisfaction by being a major player in their large farming business. She remains involved with her environmental interests and takes relieving work at several workplaces in the neighbouring townships. While she is unsure whether this will sustain her over time, for now she feels she is in the right place and that she can have as much involvement on the farm as she chooses. She has several challenges "on the go, at the moment". She remains open, though, to other possibilities. By making such a bold move once, means that she can see that it is possible to chase other dreams if she chooses. She reflects:

You know, you are stronger if you work as a unit ... and I always think like 'I've made my step'. I came to NZ, and I feel *content* ... and yeah I've accepted that is where I have ended up - and I spent that time in the city and I thought "I don't want to come back here" but then we [developed the farm] and you just learn to meld into [your position]. So this is where I am - no, no

I've been *contented*. I'm happy with my lot. But if my lot had been different I would like to think I would have been *content* with that too. So I have learned to be adaptable – we are adaptable as humans - unless you have some deep-rooted drive to do something.

It seems that while Bronwyn does have a deep-rooted drive towards a law career, she has 'chosen' (somewhat by default, it seems) to make the most of her situation within her farm-marriage. She agreed that in marrying Nick she also married a farm, but that she couldn't chose the farm (or its geographical situation); that if she was married to a lawyer, for example, and lived in a city, she probably would have had more available choices for her own life and not be tied to his job. But as she put it:

It just depends how much you click with the farming lifestyle - and I know on grey days, miserable days, you wonder what you're doing here and when the sun comes out you think 'I just don't know how lucky I am'. That's the difference I suppose. You have your moments ... and you don't get to choose where you farm or choose your home.

But, she reflected, although (to some degree) she chose in what ways she was prepared to become entangled with the farm-life and farm-work, it was a choice within boundaries and in reality she would have liked to have used her skills more or in different ways. On reflection she sees her motivation for making the big move to the city as being:

A combination of the fact that my days as a mother were just about to finish, which was quite strong and that was part of my argument, a reason for doing that and I thought 'I could be doing this [farming] and be a receptionist in [a neighbouring town] for another 25 years and I can't do that. Opportunities were presenting and I thought if I don't take this opportunity I have this future mapped out. And if I hadn't taken it I don't know how I would have coped, how it would have panned out. I'm not the sort of person to dwell on things too much – I like to think I'm adaptable. Would it have been depressive – it may well have been frustration – even now when I have the opportunity to have a day's work I don't always take it and when I do, I like the idea that I am driving *to* something. I make the change on the way and when I get to [the workplace] I'm a different person. Yes, well, I always think you make the best of what you end up with – you can control your own destiny. But the fact that I don't have to read books now and can read for enjoyment – I get enjoyment just from having that choice. But [during my time in the city] I just felt really privileged to have the *choice*; that I had *chosen* to do it and didn't *have* to do it. I feel very privileged to have choice. I can, with time-management, have choice. ... And having done it once, I know I could do it again if I choose to. ... At that time [in the city] I did choose to make my life, through not only having choice but *making* choice.

Bronwyn describes very well her transformative journey, while accepting that she makes her choices now within those options that fit with the farm. She hopes that one of their son's will continue to farm their property after them, but that he will need to find a wife before he comes home as finding a wife from her locality would be an issue. She sees finding potential farm wives as problematic with young women having so many other choices and needs yet she still has enthusiasm for life on the farm. While this may be some form of self-justification, due to a degree of entrapment, Bronwyn is enmeshed also by her sense of 'belonging to the land,' which limits her ability to leave 'home' permanently for another career as this is what she now knows best. It is where her heart lies and what she sees as a possible future for her son(s). While she flirts with other possibilities making 'side bets' (Becker, 1960; Drummond & Chell, 2001), they are only in relation to that life which became hers through choice of marriage partner.

### **Kate - 49 years old, raised on dairy farm**

Kate as described throughout this thesis is a farm-daughter who never wanted to marry a farmer. She had seen what farming had done to her mother who worked hard, had a limited life and died young. While she was determined that farming would not be her life trajectory, when her young husband wanted to go dairy farming she reluctantly agreed to support him in his dream. While he loved farming, she always struggled with the financial constraints, the hard work and the continuity of a range of isolations, personal conflict and tensions. We pick Kate up when they had just moved onto a new farm and she was left with a sickly baby and two other small children, in an old house on a dairy farm where she really didn't want to be. She felt the despair of life crushing her. Kate recalled:

A lot of it is you're actually tired ... they took all the furniture off the truck and sort of threw it in the house and off they went. And Ted – it was like five in the afternoon and he went out to have a look at the farm and there were cows calving and so he went out onto the farm and I don't know what time he got back in. But everyday he was gone at four in the morning and coming in for lunch and gone again. And here was me trying to organise the house and help him outside with these little kids. And I remember – he was trying to irrigate – I mean there was a lot on him as well – but I remember saying to him 'you've got to get me help, I'm just not coping', you know 'I need help' (tearful recalling). And he'd say 'you're all right, you're all right.' And Mum came up one day and I said 'look I need help I'm just not coping I feel as

though I could screw the kids necks' and you know, dreadful things I was thinking - with all this going on. And Mum said 'Oh no you'll be right'. You know, 'we'll help you this afternoon and you'll be right'. And I managed to just get through it – [I thought] I've just got to pull myself together you know and I think Mum thought 'oh yeah, that doesn't mean anything', you know.

The next year they shifted to another farm as sharemilkers (where they owned some of the cows, managed the farm and shared a percentage of the profits with the landowner): It was about this time that Kate recalls:

Well we had shifted down South onto another farm and we were actually sharemilking and umm it was one afternoon – the kids were mucking around outside and oh, we went for a walk and we had, you know, you would have seen them the big irrigation ditches? And I just thought ohhh – we were walking along and the kids were all looking in it and I thought to myself I'm going to come back here and I'm going to jump in that ditch – I've had enough, you know? And got home and thought – you know, I really thought I would (tearful) I would go and jump in the ditch! A big ditch you know, you're gone. And I got home and I thought 'no I can't I've got these kids, I've got farm work to do' and I just ran out of time thinking about it. But, you know, I often look at those ditches and think 'shivers!' (Hushed) You know I could have easily just jumped in there – amazing.

Over time, they shifted to other farms as sharemilkers and then into farm ownership. Timing was unfortunate as they struck droughts and an economic rural-downturn. They hung in there for 10 years. Kate felt the pressure from the Trading Bank to live on a meagre amount. Eventually, the farm was sold and a smaller one bought. Over time, neighbouring blocks were bought and the small farm once again became a big farm. The children were growing into young adults, well educated and leading very successful lives. By now, Ted was looked upon by his industry as a 'top farmer'. His production figures were hard to beat in the competitive world of dairying. To the outside world, Ted and Kate and their children were a perfect, happy and successful family, but in reality the dream had died years ago. The children had all left home when the bombshell came for Ted. Kate wanted to now fulfil her dream of moving to the city and having some time for her 'self'. Ted resisted. He was enjoying his success and still had further farm development in mind. Although the atmosphere was strained Kate decided to move herself to the city to retrain. Ted found this hard to handle – “why would she want to leave when life was so good?” The only decision for Kate was “Am I brave enough to do this?” For her, it was a gutsy move; for him it was bewildering. A period of conflict and struggle ensued with irreconcilable differences

and a gulf between meanings, understanding, needs and power. The marriage disintegrated, the farm was sold and each of the partners went their separate ways to pursue life. After several years Kate feels:

Like I'm starting a new life! Umm, it's amazing really. ... I'm just so much happier in myself. And I mean I've done a lot more for myself. I dress differently. I look at things differently. I enjoy things more, probably, you know leisure time and yeah. I don't know what it is. ... I'm financially set up so I haven't got any of that worry and that's probably a big pressure off you anyway. ... Umm I just know that I'm enjoying it a lot more. I probably enjoy cultural things a little bit more whereas, you know, I didn't really know what I really enjoyed, probably because you weren't exposed to it or anything but umm. Probably some of my new friends because I've got a lot of new friends here now, since I went through [a vocational course] and they have probably influenced me in some ways, you know. They are just sort of a different type of people. They are not farming people and they've got a lot more to talk about. They are more interested in different things.

For some time, Ted and Kate had lived parallel lives within the same house and running the same business. Their marriage according to Kate was a victim of side effects of the entanglement of farm and married work and life with financial pressures and "not having a life". Her new life depicts a psychic transformation (Birden, 2002) that cleared away the burden of depression and gave way to exhilaration and energy, as she became both the 'maker of' and decision-maker in her own life.

This story illustrates two sets of conflicting intentions, values and subjectivities. Ted was driven by the need to fulfil his ambition. He had a need to be a top farmer - anything else would be failure. His drive was overwhelming. Over time, Kate felt unvalued, abused and powerless. Farm-life worked for Ted as Kate supported him both emotionally and physically in his career. Kate, though, was dislocated from her 'whole self' in subjecting herself to a life not of her choosing. She considered marriage to be 'for life' and that her children needed both parents. For these largely socialised beliefs she subjected herself to an untenable situation. She learned to live within tensions between needs of self and others, farm and marriage, husband and family, fragmenting self. But, then, over time she dis-identified with her married and farm life, which enabled her to seek new possibilities through counter-identifying (Hodges, 1998). Her transformation required a strength she never dreamed she had. Her decision was shocking both to her self and to those around her. She has needed to learn many new skills but is finding decision-making and taking calculated

risks, refreshing and invigorating. She has, in effect, been reborn to a new life with new hopes and dreams.

### **Helen - 47 years old, raised on a large sheep and beef farm**

Helen, a farmer's daughter, earlier vividly described an 'apprenticeship' in which as a young girl she was capable of feeding a workforce and running the farm household. However, her ideology, of a traditional farm woman helping and supporting her husband and family, while being perfectly happy and fulfilled, is challenged both by her sense of self and by the different attitudes and expectations of her young adult family. A look at her young adult daughters reveals a new generation of farm daughters who are not only resisting this apprenticeship; they are not putting themselves in the situation where that might be expected of them. As they are university educated they are taking other options and negotiating other subjectivities. They question why their mother is not paid and challenge her to look at her *work* as *real work*. While this change in these young women is agentic in intentionality, it is mediated through social and cultural influences. They are not only socialised through their personal experiences of growing up on a farm and seeing their mother's labour, but also by being exposed to other ways of living and working as they leave their farming communities and participate in university life and work, in large urban centres in New Zealand and beyond. Through challenging their mother, they are effecting change not only for their 'self' but also for other women, of both generations, as assumptions about their personal worlds are questioned.

Many women spoke of learning to meet the needs of 'self' by negotiating effective roles within or outside the marriage and farm combination; seeking at some stage, to actively disentangle themselves from conflicting identities and constraints. Although not entirely successful they forge a self-identity that resides within the complex issues of work, family and self. Involvement in interests or work outside the farm is often a first step in easing the somewhat consumed and restricted farm-wife identity that confines many of these women. For Helen, voluntary community work, especially in school governance (i.e. Boards of Trustees), is identified as a social agent in revealing abilities and desires which she never previously realised. In this social and work community, a self was reflected by others, which was congruent with her known and possible selves. As Helen put it:

I loved it at the High School BOT (i.e. governance). That was the best of the lot – it was brilliant. ... Umm [I loved] policy making, which most people wouldn't find exciting at all, but I really got into it. There were interesting things happening but I think the fact that they used to value you as a contributing member, was part of it also. I enjoyed talking with the teachers and I had a good working relationship with the principal – probably felt worthy – and it was for my brain – now that's probably it too it was a bit of brain-working. I think it made me realise that I can read all that stuff – you know all the stuff you get. Heaps and heaps and heaps but I could retain it and I don't know why .... And I think *that* probably made me feel better about myself, eh? Yeah. ... Mmm and it was something I never knew that I could actually do either so it made me realise that I am actually a really good [critical] reader. ... So it's been a good skill to have. I didn't know that I had it until [BOT Chairperson] told me that I was good at this, you see.

Like many farm women, Helen was active in subjecting her 'self' to these challenging roles and worked hard to achieve recognition and positive appraisal, which assisted in forming and revealing a new 'self'. However, such change then manifested as relational tension when the new 'self' was not reflected back by her husband and family or by the working roles expected within the farm and farm household. Initially, she found this incongruence difficult to accept and felt "really down to it". As she tells it:

I used to swear and say the 'F' word - that was gross but it's a good way to express it ... that made me feel better (laughs). I remember one day standing outside when the kids were home over Xmas. And I was outside under the clothesline putting a load of washing out and I was F-ing this and F-ing that and of course there was a stunned silence in the household. And then Lester came out and said 'what the hell's the matter with you?' which was really quite *dramatic*. I think I probably said it again, I can't remember - probably 'I'm f-ing sick of all of this' and 'I don't know what the f-ing hell I'm doing here (laughs quietly). ... It makes me cry just thinking about it.

Analogously, Kaplan's (1979) early study that found farm women coped with effects of isolation and unhappiness by "having a good swear and a smoke" (p. 40). Whether the woman accepts this sense of void and lives a somewhat parallel life as "that's just the way it is" or seeks to improve the situation, may depend on the relations within the marriage, workplace and (often) extended farming family, including the distribution of power. Whichever response, either as a form of agency or subjection, it is influenced by social beliefs which when underpinned by a sense of power are transformed into affordances but when underpinned by a sense of powerlessness, become constraints. Thus power relations inform intent.

While Helen's intentionality in committing to school governance was initially manifested as a response to community need, and socially-driven involvement, there was also a subsidiary hope of interest, and a need to "mix with a different group of people". This resulted, though, in intense benefits for 'self' that were challenging, surprising and transformative. On completion of her public role with its considerable responsibility and recognition, she had a subjective drive to continue to endorse and contest her 'self', in ways besides farm-life. Such personal change can be problematic both for the woman and her partner. The husband may be confused about this new, strong-willed woman who now has different expectations. Yet, for the woman the cessation of the position leaves a void and fragmented 'self' as she misses the status and new self-meaning that her public recognition gave her. For Helen, depressive symptoms became overwhelming as she questioned her place and value in life. A lengthy debilitating period ("I spent two years crying") ensued, followed by a new challenge in farm women's politics, which affirmed and validated her newly avowed self; one that expected personal recognition and value. Again, community work and social contact are the primary reasons for this new position but it is proving to be subjective in reward.

The intervening period subjected upon her 'self' was traumatic and fragmenting. In a power relationship and in some misery, she avoided contesting her position and her incongruous self. Her newly discovered self-concept was not verified by her work and social engagement on-farm and within the marriage and farm household. She felt unwell and depressed, and while she blamed her 'age' (i.e. stage of life) it was clear from her account that she felt misunderstood, unvalued and unsupported as she questioned her place. She seemed no longer to 'belong'. Yet, she could not discuss her position with her husband as he 'took it personally'. She knew she had other 'possible selves' but lacked the confidence and support to take the step. Farm women, it seems, lose newly-found confidence very quickly on reverting to their role as helper and supporter within an alienating reserve army positioning. Once again, it is noteworthy that the farm runs better with the woman securing these roles; better for others, that is, but often not so for the woman herself. To a large degree, then, Helen has reverted to a default position yet that reference point has changed irrevocably due to her discovery of a 'possible self'.

### **Contesting ‘possible selves’ – negotiable or not**

From these narratives, we learn that contesting of ‘possible selves’, within social and cultural constraints and influences, is critical to transformative action. These participating farm women made bold courageous decisions in seeking better positions for their subjective selves. While some were strongly motivated to fix firmly on their negotiating points (in effect making many points non-negotiable), others made compromises for personal or cultural reasons. All, to some degree, experienced social, emotional and psychological isolations coupled with those genderised, financial and geographical restrictions. While social in influence these persistent restrictions, over time, instigated personal agency. It is clear, though, from these women’s stories that ‘choice’ is a function of perceived consequences and restraints, with many choosing, in effect, by default, within what they see as their responsibilities. At some stage, though, each of these farm women were driven to dis-identify with farm-life, to some extent, through their farm and farm-marriage as feelings of being misunderstood, unvalued and underutilised (in regard to their particular skills) built up to a point of suppuration. Such catalytic response forced them to challenge identity-regulation as their subjective selves became almost unrecognisable to them: they didn’t ‘know’ or feel familiar with the person they had ‘become’.

While for some a fall-back position was resumed, it is clear that these positions had moved from that originally ‘known’. While it may seem that some (e.g. Bronwyn) ‘went back’ they did in fact ‘go forward’ from their previous reference point. While Bronwyn may have traded-off her dream career, by making such a bold move once, she now knows that she could do so again. It has been an empowering experience and positioning for her. Others, like Kate, reached a point of non-negotiation where she exited the farm-marriage in order to seek new possibilities. By doing so, she admits to trade-offs including losing the support of some people but more significantly she has nostalgic regret at finishing a marriage of more than 25 years. Rather than having difficulty making her own way in a “different world”, though, she is finding it “amazing” and refreshingly empowering. It is no small insight to discover that as these women (i.e. Kate, Bronwyn and Anne) left their farm, they found it relatively easy to make really good female friends, something that had eluded them within their farming communities.

In contrast, those like Sarah and Louise, who while changing their personal lives stayed within farming positions, reported still having no female friends in whom to confide. This is a critical finding, which highlights the need for more research into relationships between masculinisation and genderised isolations; between patriarchy and its relationship with patriarchy; into interconnections between intense unhappiness or depression and dominating women exercising power over other women with supposed lesser status; and underlying issues of entrapment. Entrapment seems fundamental to many of these issues as these women repeatedly tell of their personal dilemma in seeking change for their 'self' in what is still a patriarchal workplace and culture. Some are better negotiators than others due to differing influences and constraints both personal and social, including gender and power relations. While for some women subjectivity is strengthened through participation and engagement on-farm and within their marriage, (enabling choice and resisting domination) others are unable to negotiate such agency.

Central, then, to the resolution of how farming women sustain and transform their 'selves', are their capacities for intentionality, agency and empowerment. An ability to negotiate or renegotiate a life for one's 'self' is entangled in the complex web of relations between farm, work, family and culture. While influenced by personal intent and agency, it is grounded within one's personal history. Intentionality, then, is a critical concept to consider in attempting to isolate motivational drives; in seeking resolution to such dilemmas. Intention comprises individual agency exercised as personal choice, as opposed to social agency constrained in the form of pressure to conform and meet cultural expectations (Coupland, 2003). Many of these women have difficulty isolating personal intention, due to social and cultural intent dominating their thinking and actions to a point where they sub-consciously take ownership of those objectives. Some of them buried their frustrations, isolation and feelings of being misunderstood and unvalued, accepting this as their 'lot'; a burden they are to bear according to cultural norms. Several women participants, though, have come to a point where they have exercised personal agency by extricating their 'self' from both the workplace and the marriage. That is, they leave the farm, and in seeking dissolution of marriage and collecting their share of the estate, jeopardise the continuity of the farm that they have laboured so long to build. Some within the farming community see such women as 'money-makers' who force farm sales through dissolution of marriage. They are often spoken of

judgmentally as being unreasonable, greedy and selfish. This perhaps recognises the impact of these women's agency in these actions, while ignoring or marginalising their contributions in others, and negating the legitimacy of their individual lives outside of the farm. It seems from the participating women, though, that the drive for self-knowledge is compelling.

### **A drive for knowledge**

In all the women's stories of searching for 'self', there is a strong drive for self-knowledge; knowledge of what they are capable and of possible choices. Many are creating their own quiet cultural revolutions where permission for conversations within their possible selves are being had; where aspirations and hopes are being acted out, albeit often unsustainably. The point of resistance though moves with each drive as life cannot go back to where it was. Life is changed forever. The dream may be modified to fit with other responsibilities but a revolution has been had all the same. These women are changing culture by reinventing the possibilities. Hall (1995) suggests that displaced people do not want to literally return to their roots or, in this case, to their 'previously known' yearnings. Rather, symbolic language (or action) (like "going home" or "going back", or "wouldn't marry a farmer") is a metaphor for describing suffering; "a metaphor for where they (once) were", and suggesting freedom from that suffering (p. 13). Patriarchal and matriarchal power and control underlie many decisions, 'choices' or default positions. But while some "elect to participate in and attempt to transform practices that are inconsistent with their values and beliefs" (Billett & Smith, 2006, p. 153) others elect to dis-identify and withdraw from their social or work practices (Hodges, 1998).

Within such practices many forms of entrapment are described. Conflict is depicted in all these stories where 'side bets' (Becker, 1960; Drummond & Chell, 2001) are taken, staking something of immense personal value but which proves so costly that the 'bet' becomes an unfeasible alternative. The stakeholder (the woman) concedes to a point pressured by socialisation of their roles, cultural expectations and due to emotional investments which are too difficult to fight. For practical and interpersonal reasons, they may 'flag away' other options (e.g. Bronwyn replacing her dream career for one in farming). These side bets, though, have changed their positioning irrevocably in that they know they can do it again if need arises. The

question, of whether their risk or their gamble makes their main position (farm wife or farmer) more bearable and more tenable, is questionable but many of the women concerned believe that to be the case. They feel stronger, they have more diverse skills and they have renewed confidence, even though this confidence is conditional.

However, there is a point where their “persistence becomes motivated by a desire to avoid further loss” and “uncertainty about the future” (Drummond & Chell, 2001, p. 188). Several of the women have tried to find a way to an illusive or elusive place where they think they belong, only to find a pull to return. They lack the freedom to leave the ‘known’ culture or the time and commitment to persist in making a new culture theirs. The pull back to marriage, children, farm and family-heritage is strong. There are ties that the women themselves are barely cognisant of. In many ways, their sense of identity overwhelms their self as their self is silenced by that identity. These women in remembering and in telling their stories are often personally silenced by their recent past; their adopted cultures.

In the case of women marrying farmers, they all came from another place, sometimes close by, or even from a neighbouring farm, but sometimes from great distances and from very different backgrounds. They are seemingly diasporised particularly from other more familiar female groupings; females with whom these women had common minds, spirits, common interests and a sense of sisterhood; a relationship that entailed unconditional acceptance and support. They yearn for that previously ‘known’ (or maybe illusive) place where one didn’t need to be ‘on one’s mettle’ all the time as the friends would ‘sort the wheat from the chaff’ quite willingly. But their ongoing identity is “not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed” (Hall, 1995, p.4), incorporating an array of histories. While it may be thought that in reality there comes a time when individuals cannot go back as they ‘no longer speak the language’ (figuratively speaking), deceptively those who often seem to have ‘gone back’ have in fact ‘gone forward’ as very different people with very different expectations and needs. Kate found it very easy to go back to the place of her dreams in the city as she had spent fifteen years subversively preparing her ‘self’ for the move.

For these women, though, there seems to be a point of allegiance or personal tie to the marriage that often makes this move almost impossible. These women cannot easily leave their workplace (the farm) without also leaving their marriage. The implications for the family and others, along with a lack of confidence in one’s

personal ability, add to a sense of entrapment where the women then need to self-justify or as Bronwyn says “learn to meld into [your position]. So this is where you are”. Where, in other situations, a person can usually leave their workplace without the upheaval of leaving their marriage, for farm women this entanglement is all encompassing. It seems that resistance to ‘becoming’ as in the cases of Kate and Rachel makes this choice to leave the farm (either within or without the marriage) more possible, although still difficult. It is clear, though, that within the entangled lives of farming couples the quality of the marriage is paramount. If the marriage does not support the woman in her needs she will withdraw either, by exiting the marriage and /or farm thereby forging her way in a new life or by living a parallel life on the farm. It seems many women forego their dreams for a mere existence.

As depicted, individual stories of transformations have been times of personal upheaval and crisis with Anne forced to face issues arising from early widowhood and Louise challenged severely by depression seeded through extended-family conflict and (dubiously) ‘self-imposed’ exile from her children. Sarah’s transformative actions are sourced through facing depression over a number of years and a need to do something for her ‘self’ in preservation of her soul and spirit while Rachel is fuelled through a strongly driven and strongly negotiated pre-marriage position, which she is currently working at strenuously to maintain. Bronwyn has seen other possibilities but has re-entered farm management unable to break free from strong pulls of farm and family and the difficulties, both practically and emotionally, of forging an individual career of choice. Helen, likewise, has seen other possible selves and is attempting to sustain herself through community positions while taking a more traditional pathway. Kate, though, has exited both farm and marriage and is reinventing herself while Carol is fighting a controlling husband and considering exiting her marriage and farm. I, myself, am transformed daily through this research and the challenges of high profile media and the public work it has generated, while also feeling the pull to ‘home’ and farm. I have, to some degree, experienced many of these women’s issues and feel empathy for each individually. One woman said to me that her husband had plans that were going to completely “scuttle” her dreams. “But”, she said, “you can’t stand in the way of your man’s dream”, which begged the question “What about your dreams?” I learned recently from this woman that her husband is now about to be involved in *her* dream business while they remain on their ‘home farm’. Why this

seems to some to be a selfish position is perplexing, when “after all”, as she said to me, “women have dreams too, you know?”

### **Conclusions: women’s stories of transforming selves**

In transforming their lives, all these women have needed to dis-identify in order to counter-identify; to become different selves. Those who seem to have taken the fallback position have in fact not returned to their previous positioning, although compromising their ‘self’ to some degree to fit with their other responsibilities. This it could be argued is a dilemma that we all face in life. What is new for farm women in New Zealand, though, is that we are just catching up with the changes experienced by urban women through the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. Thirty years later, through this research, it is becoming clear that farm women are experiencing their own personal and emotional conflicts and struggles enforced by cultural and social expectations. A rural version of ‘suburbia neurosis’ is shockingly apparent, when it seems it was presumed that the hard work and stoicism of rural life somehow protected women from such emptiness; a sense of void and lack of fulfilment. Sander (1985) saw marriage stability in farm-marriages due to “farm wives specialis(ing) more in household (including on-farm) work” and less in off-farm work. He saw the specialisation of farm women’s household and farm work including the “greater sexual division of labor in the farm household” as increasing the women’s “gains from marriage”. This myth it would seem has been accepted as a cultural convenience and as a management strategy.

What is clear from these women’s’ stories is that transformations occur through a range of possibilities. None of these involvements, though, are transformative on their own. It requires strength to challenge the accepted norms; to negotiate for self and to see other possibilities. They are provoked, by some sense of disintegration, alienation and lack of congruency, to newly reclaim, assert or reassert self, while reinventing a personal strength and confidence. For many this process is not chosen but coerced although agentic in action. It required a bold, intuitive or calculated decision to dis-identify and become one’s own being. The challenge is to sustain the transformative process, which if not endorsed in some way, is temporary and lacks enduring transformation.

This chapter has narrated a selection of the women's personal odysseys in changing their self and their culture through often-prolonged periods of crises. Almost all of the women interviewed and others spoken with in the field, it seems, have had major issues to face in seeking a more empowering position. The phenomenon of entrapment with its lack of freedom of choice and self-justification makes personal action difficult. This is made particularly so by a stealthful masculinisation of women and matriarchal regulation and 'policing' of women by other women, which seems anchored in patriarchy. These women though have forged new paths albeit (often) within their 'chosen' boundaries as farm wives. They have, though, through their courageous moves, been agentic in instigating cultural change even though, in many cases, the pull back to relationships and known responsibilities is overwhelming. The following chapter in conclusion summarises and advances changing subjectivities within a process of 'becoming' and 'belonging', maintaining and sustaining 'self, with hope of transformation of both 'self' and culture. It elucidates how, without empowerment to contest self, women, who are vital to the concept of the family farm, are not sustained as fully participant human beings.

## CHAPTER NINE

### WOMEN HAVE DREAMS TOO, YOU KNOW? CHANGING SUBJECTIVITIES, A SUMMATIVE DISCOURSE OF SELF

*“Silence has ‘been for women a gesture of submission but also of complicity’ (Cockburn, 1991, p. 14). Giving voice to that silence has been seen as a way of empowering women and encouraging social change. ... silence [though] contains therein its own power, and to break silence is at once to render subjects both more and less powerful” (Gatenby & Humphries, 1999, p. 283).*

This thesis has explored the lives and experiences of farm women through identifying and elaborating their changing subjectivities as ‘farm wives’, a career entered through an emotional decision of marriage rather than by choice of occupation. Importantly, it has given voice and legitimacy to the place and dreams of women on farms; it has exposed silences that have been a shelter for power. This exposé has been a revelation to both farming women and men who have lived secluded, private lives furiously protecting a myth of the farm ‘wife’ as fulfilled and happy while living life vicariously predominantly through her husband’s achievements. Issues of power, gender, isolation and entrapment have been revealed while advancing issues of subjective change within a zealous, often, unforgiving culture where the myth and propaganda do not match the realities of these women’s lives. Maintaining self and maintaining culture far from being times of stability, require some volatility as both command transformative and, sometimes, contradictory change to sustain the woman’s humanness while ensuring the sustainability of the New Zealand icon of the family farm. This icon is the product of a short, but proud, history of an agricultural industry built on the concept of the family-farm-unit that has served the country well.

Historically, in New Zealand women who entered farming through marriage left their previous lives and aspirations behind. Through a choice of life-partner they married not only that man, but also his farm, his career and often his extended farming family. Previous generations of women worked hard at ‘becoming’ ‘farmers’ wives’. They were strongly influenced by social and cultural expectations (e.g. Belich, 2001). Their personal needs didn’t come into the equation (e.g. Studholme,

1940/1954); they married and over time their identity became increasingly engulfed within that of their husband's. Gender equality in the workplace was not a major issue in this environment, which encouraged interdependence. Those generations of women largely worked at forgetting their 'selves' and worked at fitting in with the farm, and the farming community. However, in this present study it emerges that many women who became farm wives in the 1960s – 80s often went through traumatic transitional identities. Some 'accepted' lives of subservience and complicity while others through negotiation or resistance forced new personal trajectories. But some never 'became'. They existed in that transitional state for a prolonged period, living in the margins of their farming communities, with some choosing eventually to leave both the farm and the marriage to reclaim self. Many fought a deep sense of emptiness and feeling of unwellness, with some riding periods of deep struggle and conflict. However, younger farm wives (i.e. those entering farm-marriages in the 1990s – 2000s) offer different perspectives and engage in farm-life in different ways. They seem, more commonly, to actively resist 'becoming' a devoted and committed 'farm wife'. Often, they have talked issues through before marriage and they expect their needs and their reservations to be respected, considered and valued. They are stronger negotiators and more comfortable with resistance and voice. It appears that those who agree to a period of life on-farm still go through some transition but within the transition period most are very aware of maintaining their 'self'. Cultural pressures and expectations to conform, though, are immense.

### **Farm women and their subjective change**

After interviewing farming men for my previous research and repeatedly hearing descriptions of their wives as 'helpers' and 'sounding boards', I had gnawing questions of what other farming women were doing out there on their farms; how were they living their lives? I knew I was more than a helper and sounding board, but I realised I had little real idea of what others were experiencing as farm women and as farm wives. Silences well-protect both privacy and knowledge of 'self' and 'other', it seems. For me, there were burning questions about what was happening to the sense of self and identity of all those women out there on farms, whose contributions almost certainly go beyond the terms used to describe them; of how they were maintaining

their 'selves' as individual persons; and how they were transforming their selves over time? It was this concern that motivated this research.

To investigate these questions, a number of women were selected as participants. These women were drawn from a wide range of farming contexts including, some sheep and beef farmers, some dairy, some who worked on-farm, some who worked off-farm. They included some younger and some older women; some from extended farming families; some who had left their marriages and farm for different reasons; and women who were engaged in different sociocultural positions while farming. Auto/ethnographic and feminist methodologies involving case studies, participant observation and researcher-as-subject were selected as a means to hear the women's stories and their 'silences'. What I found was surprising and quite shocking to me initially. Four of the first five women I interviewed were tearful telling their stories and the fifth seemingly laughed too readily while speaking of her depression. It became very apparent that not all was well out there on the farm. Women were feeling unvalued as they spoke of unsustainable lives of poverty during which they had long since ceased to have fun, and they struggled to have any quality time to themselves. This problem seemed to be deeply embedded in a strength of cultural history, and by all accounts, required major personal change in seeking to 'become'.

### **Becoming, belonging and being a farm wife**

In any change of culture or change of position there is a process of becoming, maintaining and transforming. 'Becoming' a farm wife is often an exciting but challenging time as one seeks to 'belong'. Through a process of learning to prepare the 'right' food, to dress 'correctly', to raise animals and cope with machinery, one is then able to increasingly interact in an informed manner, lending one some legitimacy. Armed with a moderate level of knowledge of the culture and with the 'right' attitude, one may then be able to infiltrate this new world to a point of acceptance and with a sense of belonging. This 'walking the walk' and 'talking the talk', though, does not afford one full membership. That only comes with time and that time may take several generations in the case of relatively closed rural communities. Personal conversations with farm women reveal conflicts of identity as some feel restricted by cultural and social norms and limited by conventional options and expectations. Such cultural oppression results in fragmentation and lack of

cohesion, with loss of connection between the self and everything else, which results in a dynamic struggle for selfhood and its relationship to a particular culture (Fenwick, 2000). It seems that the place of farm women while changing on the surface is not changing in the 'bedrock'. Culturally, it still requires the woman to 'become' a certain person, and to 'play the game' commanding committed and particularised engagement.

Newcomers are required to develop a cultural understanding and standing within the community chosen, albeit as a condition of their rite of passage (i.e. marriage to a local farmer). Such transformations require concerted and intentional efforts in order to produce trajectories, while forming social relations that enable what may be described as inter-cultural inhabitants (Lave 2001). These women may experience a dilemma or tension in such cross-cultural social situations or gulfs. A sense of incohesion may accompany different expectations as they attempt to integrate old cultural norms with their newly acquired but largely unknown cultural and societal expectations. Integration may be difficult if the new culture dominates, requiring considerable effort to avoid feelings of alienation.

The biggest challenge though seems to come in the maintenance phase. How does one maintain one's 'self' within a culture that by its very structure and mix of interdependent and independent needs, seeks to *make* one belong by imposing strong expectations? Then, the personal, and often lonely, challenge, over time is to navigate transformative actions, which enable personal fulfilment, mental stimulation and self-satisfaction rather than living life as substitute through the career of one's life-partner. From the women's stories, this is a particularly emotionally-demanding time for farm women as they struggle to find some equilibrium in their lives. Throughout this thesis personal stories have been told to illustrate such points which exemplify the realities of demanding issues in these farm women's lives. There is a continual challenge for farm women to balance their needs and feelings of responsibility to their farm-marriage, family, farm and community, with needs of 'self'. For those who agree to life as a farm woman, it seems that how an individual adapts or resists is crucial to how she remodels her self to fit in with the new culture; or attempts to change this culture to fit with needs of 'self'; or, indeed, a combination of these transformations.

These cultural changes manifest as both micro (e.g. farm-marriage) and macro (e.g. rural, farming life and community) issues, with the traditional family farm relying heavily on the 'farm wife' and her many roles, for its very existence and its

viability. Yet these women's roles are often taken for granted, without their full contributions and the impact of rural life on these women being understood. Here, the experiences and changes in subjectivity of farming women, from their perspectives, are seen as critical. A view arises of hardworking women who toil to support their farm and families in their many roles with little time left for self. Terms like 'helper' fail to empower the women or endow them with anything more than peripheral participation. Over time, for some, often due to emotional exhaustion, their personal sense of self, as a woman, cannot be maintained. It seems that negotiation of tensions in their everyday life can shape both their continuity and transformative journeys to selfhood. But the first challenge to a new farm woman, entering farming through marriage rather than personal choice, is that of some mode of adaptation. From here, different and distinct patterns of women's subjectivities emerge.

### **Adaptation and relationships to agency**

Ways of adapting or resisting seems to be strongly correlated to strength of personal agency. Adaptation, as a process of changing or modifying to suit new conditions or a different purpose, requires not only 'becoming' but ongoing maintenance. Some mode of adaptation is essential to survival in any social system, through management and response to the environs. Analyses of the women's narratives of adaptation to their once new roles as farm wives depicted three explicit responses. These consist of: *assimilation*, a process in which a minor adopts the values and patterns of behaviour of the host culture, *accommodation*, a process in which different groups "adjust to each other's existence and co-exist without necessarily resolving underlying differences and conflicts" (Jary & Jary, 1995, p. 2) drawing on Piaget (1968), or alternatively, *resistance*. With resistance, subcultures reflect "negotiated responses" to social upheaval where the mass culture is not simply accepted but challenged (ibid, p.556). While most women in this study seemed to initially presume assimilation into their new culture, in fact, very few appeared to sustain this way of thinking over a period of time. Those who did persist seemed to achieve an uneasy self-other relationship, with few fully adopting the expected practices. Those who accommodated talked of 'making the most of things' but their adaptation did not seem to be full or to have permanence because it was often not a genuine choice.

The enduring mode of adapting to change seemed to be a fluid mix of accommodation combined with a healthy resistance. Resisting and challenging the status quo through negotiation, or demand, proved to be more problematic for some women raised as farm-daughters than for those new to farming who had other sets of values and beliefs to invoke. For the farm-reared women, it often took a crisis or a significant struggle, (at times encompassing a depth of despair), to enable some invocation of resistant challenge. But these levels of emotional upheaval and personal struggle challenged urban-raised women also. According to the participating women's life stories, these struggles often included prolonged clinical depression, periods of suicidal thoughts, threat of marriage breakdown, sustained lack of personal satisfaction and mental stimulation or, more simply, prolonged unhappiness and lack of fulfilment.

Such personal struggles, without exception, led to major transformations with some women making life-changing decisions. It seems critical that challenges were sought, in order to construct an authentic sense of place with some sense of belonging. This 'sense of belonging', though, presented itself as highly sensitive to changes in the women's aspirations and personal and work commitments thereby producing a lasting tension in their lives. It implied a range of secure relationships with farm, family, work and community which were not associated with enforced control, lack of negotiating power or an imposition of a range of isolations.

Likewise, there was an enduring tension between personal agency and social agency, as social pressures and cultural expectations reward sameness with social inclusiveness. In contrast, difference was often met with exclusion unless there was a perception that one had earned that position of difference. Cultural perceptions suggest that individuals have a 'choice' between a form of assimilation and self-imposed marginality due to resistance to cultural norms. Yet, in fact, individual subjective needs of 'self' often negate 'choice'. But reinvention or metamorphosis is sometimes a response to the dilemma facing marginalisation when seeking a place of comfort, a place to call home (Suvin, 2005). Those who appear to assimilate often have, more accurately, 'buried their 'self' alive', trying desperately to hide their peripheral state of being. However, in their marginal, confused, misunderstood and alienated states, these women can sometimes become quite zealous and act in a controlling role 'policing' other women who dare to be different. They attest to being threatened by others who may challenge the often-restricted life into which they have

invested so much. But from the experiences of women in this study it is doubtful that this level of commitment, to what is often an alienated life, is sustainable.

For these women, the complex position among self, farm, family, work and community is more likely to be successfully navigated if the individual finds a challenging work role with personal recognition. However, in reality, for many farm women, the more accessible forms of work may be limiting and undesirable, adding to a sense of estrangement (Suvin, 2005). Such women, displaced either through farm-ownership structure or through resistance to the accepted norm, usually seek either actively or through more obscure inner personal needs, to build a new sense of self, through accommodation. Others may see this as a time of 'settling down' or 'settling in', though such a description is problematic as resistance can be a form of mental stimulation and a drive to seek active solutions. In Kate's case, for example, a prolonged period of "giving in" and "making the best of things" became avoidance, with eventual withdrawal from farm life and exodus to a new life in the city. The two alternatives to heavy resistance appear to be to attempt assimilation with little negotiation or to accommodate with or without negotiation. These essentially fallback positions indicate a tension between self and social and between maintenance of self and that of culture.

### **Maintenance: tension of self and culture**

Maintenance of one's self, then, requires strength of personal agency considering the need to push the boundaries of a very traditional culture. But, there is thorough evidence from the women in this study that those who continue to defy the norms, reasserting resistance while negotiating for 'self', do transform both their self and the culture. This, though, is by no means a linear process. It undulates with periods of fervour and periods of quiescence as needs arise and different life events occur and relationships change. Those who maintain some consistency and persistence, though, seem better able to accommodate the changes into their lives, whereas those who acquiesce are more likely to make radical changes enforced through points of crisis. Both personal and cultural transformations seem strongly agentic in origin but both require social support in the form of others, to maintain that transformative change.

Closing the major void between needs of 'self' and 'other' is often extremely difficult. It is a source of major conflict and struggle which while anchored in

patriarchal ideology, is supported by the associated phenomenon of matriarchal power and control which emerges from this research as both alarming and critical.

### **Women inadvertently maintaining patriarchal power and control**

While the inter-relationships between patriarchy and matriarchy need further research, it seems clear that the latter is borne of the former. While patriarchy can only exist and persist when women actively participate in the construction and reconstruction of patriarchal structures, as shown in this thesis, it is immensely difficult to resist. This is particularly so when living in what is still predominantly a conservative, traditional culture isolated from explicit, frank and gendered support. Further, those imposing the power (on women) are dependent on women's responses to maintain that systemic power (Bennett, 2004). So, from this perspective farm women maintain both patriarchal and matriarchal power by their responses whether through appeasement or resistance. Yet, forms of resistance may be a means to re-authorise or reconstitute dominant discourses with these discourses being accepted in totality only by those who fail to see differentiations or to consider modifications (Gatenby & Hume, 2004). However, a range of isolations, a sense of privacy and loyalty to farm, family and culture have silenced women's voices thereby stifling many potential catalysts for change. Thus, farming gender-relations have been reproduced over generations due to lack of voicing of women's unfulfilled lives within that discourse; silence motioning both submission and complicity (Gatenby & Humphries, 1999). But, while women who resist imposed gender-related constraints or cultural expectations can be perceived as active agents of change rather than passive acceptors of constraining structures (Green, 1998), to others they are seen as a threat. Those who work to preserve the norm through acting as caretaker or defender of the known position problematise change by not legitimising those of the younger generation, particularly, who see new combinations that better suit their needs. This blind defence is detrimental to progress and advancement.

It seems that a generation has been lost as the feminist questioning of women's positions from the 1970s has not penetrated rural culture. Yet, often there are only a few dominant and, therefore, influential women who block all efforts at change. As a result, others are inclined to find their own individual way, thereby further dismantling any support by women for women. It is apparent that some of

these more powerful women with sociocultural status would preference the destruction of social structures rather than allow younger women to penetrate their territory. This may contribute to prolonged individual transitional periods identified in this research as gaining in permanence; prolonged, for some, due to resistance to change and acceptance of traditional positions of power, status and control emanating from patriarchy and matriarchy. Lack of discussion and authentic sharing of experiences isolates those who do not conform to the accepted 'norm', and thus delays remaking of identities and culture through accommodation or more extreme change.

### **Relationships among identity, self, structure and agency**

These inauthentic discourses, then, reveal complex relationships among identity, self, social structures and agency. As these farm women's experiences indicate, in the process of 'becoming' there is, invariably, an intertwining of roles and engulfing of self with others (especially the husband), which constitutes inauthentic, habitual identities. Subsequently, continuity and maintenance of the 'self' is difficult due to the burying of the 'known self' in this unreliable and incohesive subjectivity. Commonly, the 'known self' is not reflected or verified by others, adding to conflict, tension and self-confusion. Thus, a gulf appears between the subjective 'I' known to self and the reflected 'me' as the identity known to others. Within this invalid state, there is difficulty maintaining everyday roles while seeking authenticity among these 'conflicting selves'. There is a sense that for some, a feeling of alienation is simmering under the surface (Fenwick, 1999). For these women, this often manifests itself as sullenness, misery and depression. As intentionality is tensely competitive between cultural expectations and personal needs, an interaction occurs between the social world and human agency. From a changing sense of self and a need to transform one's subjectivity, new norms or expectations are constructed albeit through much resolution and considerable struggle.

This study of farming women supports Fenwick's (1999) assertion that a strong and at times desperate search for coherence, authenticity and congruence, is the drive behind agentic questioning of one's place and situated constraints. Without empowerment to contest self, women who are vital to the concept of the 'family farm' are not sustained as fully participant human beings. As such, this current inquiry

reveals a culture that is compromising its future through not valuing and sustaining the needs of farm women. Behind this drive seems a need to 'belong' to somewhere, to ground their identity, and yet, often they no longer belong to their old life nor their newly adopted culture. Ironically, though, a strong sense of 'belonging' doesn't necessarily accompany this 'becoming' as it has confines and constraints.

It seems that a sense of belonging may rely on to what degree one is prepared to "buy into" (Wertsch, 1998, p.55) the expected norms and behaviours. Choice is relative and may range from that of fully embracing the culture, competencies and skills, to "strongly resisting". It seems clear that in order for these women to 'become' and to 'belong' one needs some sense of knowing, of power, of integration and of valued recognition. This in itself seems to sabotage the women's sense of self and many younger farm women are actively resisting being suitably "informed". In others, as Wertsch (ibid) theorises, mastery may be high and yet covert resistance and dissimulation or pretence, may cloud a low level of appropriation. In these cases, the work and life choices lack personal intentionality or 'putting one's own stamp on it'. This misappropriation, consequently, is manifested in lack of true identity and lack of authenticity.

It seems from these women's accounts that they often 'become' farm wives in spite of their selves, not from choice but from social expectations and command within a dominant patriarchal system. A critical essence of this system consists of an intense and persistent interplay between gender relations and power relations (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Connell, 1987, 2002, 2005). Women, often unwittingly, have sustained and reproduced these dominant relations by either free or reluctant participation in the culture as it is known. Negotiating a change in these power relations, though, is problematic as challenging such situations can be destructive and fragmenting.

This research has highlighted a particularly delicate balance of power between successive generations of farm women, particularly in extended farming families. This almost certainly extends to power relations between marriage and life-partners. Crossing boundaries between patriarchal power and matriarchal power seems precarious as both power bases are destructive for subordinates. Both, it seems, are intractable as, with the engulfment of identity, the subordinate 'self' succumbs to the dominating status. This lack of congruence may result in abandonment or at the very least, neglect of one's authentic 'self' (Adler & Adler, 1991). It seems, though, that

resistance to consummate-participation is gaining traction as women acknowledge a need of choice for their 'self'. However, it seems that even with the best intentions most farm women succumb to the limitations farm-life imposes. Although many women genuinely love the life of farming, in 'becoming' they trade off other selves that they see as possible. It is unclear, though, to what extent self-maintenance is possible within this trade-off. Indeed, such bartering can be self-destructive and hostile to true maintenance of 'self'. What is clear, however, is that many of the women participants exhibit a loss of confidence in their personal abilities and so tell themselves that the possible is in fact impossible. Relationships of power, knowledge, gender and ownership, at times openly and sometimes subtly, manipulate the woman's position and self-confidence. These relationships are produced, maintained and transformed not only through the "cultural and social relations of power between women and men, (but also among women and [among] men)" (Hodgson, 2001, p.16). Many of the women in this study are redefining boundaries by challenging power inequalities embedded in their specific cultural situations.

From these accounts, then, it is learned that while 'becoming' is a product of constructing new meanings, maintenance is more one of advancing in authority and in position, within recognisable points of self-verification. Maintenance requires a sense, at least, of personal achievement and value. While some women try to navigate an assumed role in farm management, it is problematic, firstly, as it seems difficult to assert a position of empowerment and, secondly, due to a reluctance borne out of hidden and often frustrated, personal aspirations. It seems, though, that even with the best intentions most farm women engaged through this study succumb to the limiting positions that farm-life imposes. It seems that how women manage issues of entrapment are relative to how they experience their marriage relationship and how they are placed in this gendered power-exchange.

### **Contesting 'possible selves' – negotiable or not**

While maintenance requires either *actively* working at continuance or forging a new direction, a *default* position may *seem* to maintain. But in reality defaulting, more accurately, maintains mediocrity with its limitations and dependencies. For some, a cohesive interrelationship between marriage, farm and community, although fraught with difficulties and often exploitative of the 'self', gives some security and some

sense of standing. This is particularly so in transitional periods. Again, a known or unnamed sense of entrapment has conflicting personal responses as the rewards of status and alliance are weighed against a lack of individual integration. Anti-depressants, and in some cases alcohol, seem to smooth over extreme anxieties for some women through transitional periods, on the way to possible transformations. Relationships to old friends, career and known places are often threatened in the process, through over-commitment.

From these narratives, we learn that contesting of 'possible selves', within social and cultural constraints and influences, is critical to transformative action. These participating farm women made bold courageous decisions in seeking better positions for their subjective selves. While some were strongly motivated to fix firmly on their negotiating points (in effect making many points non-negotiable), others made compromises for personal or cultural reasons. All, to some degree, experienced social, emotional, intellectual and psychological isolations coupled with gendered, financial and geographical restrictions. While social in influence these persistent restrictions, over time, instigated personal agency. It is clear, though, from the women's stories that 'choice' is a function of perceived consequences and restraints, with many choosing, in effect, by default, within what they see as their responsibilities. At some stage, though, each of these farm women were driven to dis-identify with farm-life, to some extent, through their farm and farm-marriage as feelings of being misunderstood, unvalued and underutilised (in regard to their particular skills) built up to a point of suppuration. Such catalytic response forced them to challenge identity-regulation as their subjective selves became almost unrecognisable to them: they didn't 'know' or feel familiar with the person they had 'become'.

It is no small insight to discover that those participating women who left their farms (e.g. Kate, Bronwyn and Anne) found it relatively easy to make good female friends, something that had eluded them within their farming communities. In contrast, those like Sarah and Louise who, despite changing their personal lives while staying within farming positions, reported still having no confiding female friends. This is a critical finding, which highlights the need for more research into relationships between masculinisation and gendered isolations. This includes inquiry about patriarchy and its relationship with patriarchy; into interconnections between intense unhappiness or depression and dominating women exercising power over

other women with supposed lesser-status; and underlying issues of entrapment. Entrapment seems fundamental to many of these issues as these women repeatedly tell of their personal dilemma in seeking change for their 'self' in what is still a patriarchal workplace and culture. Some are better negotiators than others due to differing influences and constraints both personal and social, including gender and power relations. While for some women subjectivity is strengthened through participation and engagement on-farm and within their marriage, (enabling choice and resisting domination) others are unable to negotiate such agency.

Central to resolving how farming women sustain and transform their 'selves', are their capacities for intentionality, agency and empowerment. An ability to negotiate or renegotiate a life for one's 'self' is entangled in the complex web of relations between farm, work, family and culture. While influenced by personal intent and agency, it is grounded within one's personal history. Intentionality, then, is a critical concept to consider in attempting to isolate motivational drives, in seeking resolution for such dilemmas. Intention comprises individual agency exercised as personal choice, as opposed to social agency constrained in the form of pressure to conform and meet cultural expectations (Coupland, 2003). But many of these women have difficulty isolating their personal intention due to social and cultural intent dominating their thinking and actions to a point where they sub-consciously take ownership of those objectives. However, it seems from the women participating in this study that a drive for self-knowledge is compelling.

### **A drive for knowledge**

In all the women's stories of searching for 'self', there is a strong drive for self-knowledge; knowledge of what they are capable and of possible choices. Many are creating their own quiet cultural revolutions where permission for conversations within their possible selves are being had; where aspirations and hopes are being acted out, albeit often unsustainably. The point of resistance, though, moves with each subsequent drive as life cannot go back to where it was. Life is changed forever. The dream may be modified to fit with other responsibilities but a revolution has been had all the same. These women are changing culture by reinventing the possibilities. Hall (1995, p. 13) suggests that displaced people do not want to literally return to their roots or, in this case, to their 'previously known' yearnings. But, rather, that symbolic

language (or action) (like “going home” or “going back”, or “wouldn’t marry a farmer, again”) is a metaphor for describing suffering; “a metaphor for where they (once) were”, and suggesting freedom from that suffering. Patriarchal and matriarchal power and control underlie many decisions, ‘choices’ or default positions. But while some “elect to participate in and attempt to transform practices that are inconsistent with their values and beliefs” (Billett & Smith, 2006, p. 153) others elect to dis-identify and withdraw from their social or work practices (Hodges, 1998).

These women, often against huge odds, found ways of negotiating or claiming transformative measures for ‘self’ frequently through trajectories underpinned by personal crises. Yet, what is clear from these women’s stories is that transformations occur through a range of possibilities. But, none of these involvements are transformative on their own. Each requires strength to challenge the accepted norms; to negotiate for self and to see other possibilities. They are provoked, by some sense of disintegration, alienation and lack of congruency, to newly reclaim, assert or reassert self, while reinventing a personal strength and confidence. For many, this process is not chosen but coerced, although agentic in action. It requires a bold, intuitive or calculated decision to dis-identify and become one’s own being. However, the challenge is to sustain the transformative process, which if not endorsed in some way, is temporary and lacks enduring transformation.

### **Conclusion: Changing cultural expectations**

So how can there be life and ‘life on the farm’? The issues are complex, and the needs and solutions individual, but one thing is clear – women’s needs must be prioritised. Ways need to be found to enable these needs, interests and careers to be met. If it is not a good economic decision then maybe it is a good decision for other reasons. Any solutions will need to be creative and sometimes the decision not to farm will be the right one. Cultures change when people think about issues, have conversations together and repeat these conversations to others. Society is continually changing and for any culture to survive it must change with its people. Issues need to come out of the closet. Such change can occur but it means being prepared to brave the new and to challenge the status quo; to be prepared to ‘rock the boat’. What this recent exposure has done is: it has given both farming women and men permission to have much

needed conversations and to negotiate other possibilities; a challenging but essential 'road to hoe' if the family farm is to remain an icon of New Zealand life.

In conclusion, this thesis has advanced contributions to understanding how 'farm wives' negotiated, reconstructed and reshaped their sense of self, and, at times, also strongly resisted and dis-identified with the social world in which they found themselves unwittingly (and at times, unwillingly) embedded.

**Key contributions made here are:**

1. The central role of 'becoming' and 'belonging' as a function of managing geographical, psychological, social, financial, emotional, intellectual and genderised isolations, along with negotiating a culture of masculinisation. These largely cultural impositions and their negotiation impact greatly on the personal wellness of a woman marrying a farmer, his farm and/or farming career and often his extended farming family.
2. Maintenance of self exists as a function of a sense of belonging, without which maintenance is elusive and issues of entrapment often manifest as matriarchal power and control between competing generations of women. Boundaries between patriarchal power and matriarchal power are precarious as both power bases are destructive for subordinates. Both involve engulfment of self as the subordinate succumbs to the dominating status.
3. Maintenance of one's 'self' requires strength of personal agency. Those who are more strongly influenced by social and cultural expectations seem to bury their own needs and aspirations, in order to belong. In doing so, cultural norms and expectations are maintained. Those who are strongly agentic in their resistance and in negotiating for their 'self' are more concerned with *changing* cultural norms and expectations. The maintenance of that drive and commitment is challenged though, particularly due to a lack of solidarity between farm women.
4. There is thorough evidence from this research that women who continue to defy the norms, reasserting resistance while negotiating 'self', in doing so transform

both their 'self' and their culture. These resistors though face resistance from other women often of a higher sociocultural status. Increasingly this transformation is made through negotiating an exit from the farm-marriage.

**This leads to a need for further inquiry in the areas of:**

1. The cultural relationships between patriarchy and matriarchy and ensuing entrapments.
2. The cultural lag of farming culture to embrace shared family life and dual careers as promoted in the 1970s second wave of feminism.
3. Issues of the sustainability of an individual struggling to 'belong' to a culture not of their choosing. It seems transitional identities are forced to become 'permanent' resulting in a disintegrative, alienated sense of 'self' with a lack of fulfilment and a sense of void.

Finally, and of great salience, this research has resonated with New Zealand farming women of all ages and also with young farming men who are struggling with the resistance of young women to marry onto farms. The response, while challenging, indicates strong relevance and critical need.

As one woman said:

*"You can't stand in the way of a man's dreams, but ... (she mused) women have dreams too, you know?"*

## EXAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED OPEN INTERVIEWS

*These questions were compiled as a guide and in reality only referred to occasionally. An emphasis was put on the women telling their stories with some spontaneity, while maintaining a focus. The bullet points were available as prompts if necessary - in reality seldom required.*

1. Tell me a bit about your background.
  - Where did you grow up?
  - What did your father and mother do?
  - Did you have any experience of being rural or of farming?
  - What or who were influential in your early years?
  
2. Where did you go to school?
  - Did you enjoy it?
  - What were you good at?
  - What Level did you reach? What attainment?
  - What or who were your main influences - positive or negative?
  
3. What happened when you left school?
  - What influenced choices? Career options.
  - What or whom do you see as major influences to this stage?
  - Friends, life partner choices, travel etc.
  
4. When you married your farming husband/partner what were your expectations as a farm wife?
  - What community expectations surprised you? How did you handle these?
  - How did you actually learn to be a farm wife? Learn to provide food for shearers? Milk cows? Raise calves? Do the books etc? Intent?
  - How did you handle living with the job seven days a week?
  - Having only farm income?
  - How long did it take you to adjust to this lifestyle?
  - Any shocks/surprises? How did you feel about those instances?
  - What was hard? What did you enjoy?
  - When did you feel lonely? How easy was it to make new friends?
  - What things/people did you miss?
  - (Why questions – intent)
  
5. If you were urban raised or had lived in an urban situation what adjustments were required?
  
6. Did you work off- farm? Tell me about that.
  - How did it change life?
  - How did off-farm work add to your life? General wellbeing?

- How did it fit in with your roles in the farm household and farmwork generally?
  - Why did you choose to work off-farm? (Intent).
7. Having children. Tell me about becoming a mother.
- How did life change? What are your memories of these times?
  - Good times and difficulties.
  - How did being a mother change you role on-farm and/or off-farm?
  - How did you balance life? Make time for yourself?
  - Why questions.
8. Tell me about how your life proceeded as the children grew up.
- Community involvement (throughout) – how did this change?
  - How did this contribute to you as a person? Positives and negatives.
  - What replaced the ‘business’ and ‘busyness’ of young children?
  - How did on-farm involvement change. Off-farm work?
9. How did life change as children left home?
- Place of hobbies – work – community. Grandchildren.
  - On-farm, off-farm work. Things for yourself. As a couple.
  - Why did you do ...
10. How do you see your role as a farm woman?
- How has it changed over the years?
11. How have you experienced times of adversity?
- What times were particularly difficult? Droughts, illness etc
  - ... enjoyable. ... busy. ...tiring.
12. Who were your role models?
- People you admired; wished to be like? Why?
13. What are/were the good things about being a farm woman?
- ... difficult things?
  - What places have women’s groups or similar played in maintenance?
  - Why have you kept involved?
14. What times – events – people transformed your ‘self’ as a person.
- Transformative experiences?
15. What have you missed out on (than if you lived an urban life)?
- What have you gained?
  - How do you think it would have been different?
16. What would be your dream? Is it still possible?
17. What advice would you give your daughter/ daughter-in-law/son regarding the life of a farming partner/woman.

- How did your mother/mother-in-law/older farm women etc influence you both positively and negatively?
  - How does that differ today from the previous generation?
- 18.** If you were marrying today what would you change? What would be ideal?
- What advantages would a two-income family in town have? Disadvantages.
  - (Why questions – intent.)
- 19.** What has been difficult about living in a rural community? ... about being a woman in a rural community?
- Have you got good woman friends? ... good men friends? Is this difficult?
  - How important are friendships? Talking on the phone rather than in person?
- 20.** To what extent have you been fulfilled? ... not fulfilled as a farm wife/woman?
- Compare with now if no longer on a farm.
- 21.** How would you describe your role, place, and position over the years? Now?
- 22.** Tell me about four/six important (transforming) events in your life and why they were important.
- 23.** Tell me about your main influences throughout life and why. i.e. as a child, as a teenager, as a young adult, and now.
- 24.** What have been the major struggles. How are they different for a farm woman than a man? ... different than for women in town?
- 25.** What tensions have you experienced as pulls and pushes, limits or conflicts, throughout time?
- What results or consequences have come from these times?
- 26.** How do you see it changing for the next generation of women?
- For succession?
  - Is the kinship – extended family a problem / a benefit? How does it fit with your wants and needs?
- 27.** Anything you want to add? Any questions or comments?

**MEDIA INTERVIEWS, PRINT ARTICLES, RADIO AND TELEVISION**

**Articles from interviews in print media (2006/07) numerous including:**

1. 'Many Farmers' wives unhappy' 20/05/06 Andrew Swallow. *The Timaru Herald South Canterbury NZ*
2. 'Farm women face emotional isolation, lack mental stimulation' 22/05/06 NZPA *Rural Society of New Zealand (RSNZ) Daily News*. <http://www.rsnz.org/news/index.php>
3. 'Farm Wives Unhappy' 23/05/06 NZPA *The Dominion Post* (A3) Wellington, NZ
4. 'Emotional Isolation issue with rural women: study. Level of unhappiness surprises researcher', 24/05/06. New Zealand Press Association (NZPA), *Otago Daily Times, Dunedin, NZ* (p. 28).
5. 'Many farm women 'unfulfilled'', 24/05/06, NZPA *Ashburton Guardian* Mid-Canterbury, NZ (p.7).
6. 'Study attracts plenty of attention', 26/05/06. Rosa Studholme, *The Oamaru Mail* (p.3)
7. 'Unhappiness ignites firestorm: Rural women have to be negotiators, PhD researcher says' 29/05/06. Andrea Fox *New Zealand Farmers Weekly* (p.32) Also available: <http://www.country-wide.co.nz/a-man/view.php?content=cgi-bin/viewArticleExt.cgi&articleID=5238&emailLink=1>
8. 'Rural women insights welcome' 29/05/06 *New Zealand Farmers Weekly*, Editorial (p. 14)
9. 'Married to the farm' 05/07/06 Jeff Smith *Courier Country* (p.7) and *Southern RuralLife*
10. 'Compelling Speech', 06/12/2006, (p. 40), *Community High Country Herald, SI NZ*
11. 'Rural women seek support: Study', (p. 4), *The Timaru Herald* 30/11/2006.

12. Rural Mums: Spending \$1000 a time at the supermarket and crossing six fords to get there is all part of remotw living, Feb/March 2007. Lucy Horne, *Little Treasures Magazine*.
13. Range RWNZ Newsletters 2006 & 2007 including 'Rural Women NZ' Issue No. 2 June 2007

### **Radio Interviews**

1. Nine to noon *National Radio* (Live) 22/05/06 9.10am
2. Checkpoint *National Radio* (Live) 22/05/06 6.30pm
3. Leading *National Radio* Mid-day and Evening News item 22/05/06
4. Find a farmer a wife *National Radio* Mid-day Rural news (12.35pm) 05/10/07.

### **Primetime National Television Programmes and dates of interviews**

1. *TV One news* 6 pm 23/05/06 (film & interview)
2. *Breakfast TV 1*, 7.20 am (Live), 24/05/06
3. 'Campbell Live' *TV 3* (Prime news and current affairs), 7pm 5/06/06 (film & interview)

### **Radio Comment**

1. Invited Commentary from PhD Research - Jan Allan, 08/07/06 *Solid Gold/The Edge FM Radio* Oamaru. 10.30am

### **Presentations (2006, 2007) following media attention**

1. Droughtmaster farm discussion group (genesis of media attention) 25/04/06 Ikawai, South Canterbury, NZ
2. Federated Farmers Provincial AGM/Conference 10/05/06, Keynote Speaker, Pleasant Point, South Canterbury, NZ
3. Taumaranui Sustainable Land Management Group and 'Women in Farming' with AgResearch Farming Food and Health Team, Hamilton, NI, NZ. Keynote Speaker and workshop: *Social sustainability issues*, Taumaranui, NI, NZ 23/08/06

4. Waimate Rotary Dinner, 6.30pm 14/09/06, Waimate, SI, NZ
5. 'Highway 72' Rural women's Dinner Mt Somers, 7pm 21/09/06, Mid-Canterbury, NZ
6. Caitlins Rural women Dinner, Owaka, Southland, NZ (with men invited) 7pm 27/09/06
7. Rural Women NZ Provincial (National Attendees) AGM/Conference Caroline Bay Timaru. 29/11/06 Keynote Speaker.
8. Rural Women NZ South Island Regional Conference - Keynote Speaker. Pudding Hill Conference Centre, Mt Somers, Canterbury. 3/06/2007
9. Invited Guest Speaker King Country & Rangitikei Women in Farming Groups. Open meeting and Residential Retreat: 23-24 April 2007 at The Chateau, Mt Tongariro, NI., NZ.
10. Waihaorunga Country Womens Institute Group, District Meeting. September, 12, 2007. 7.30pm
11. South Island Dairy Events (SIDE) Conference Lincoln University, Canterbury NZ. Invited speaker, series of three workshops 18-20 June, 2007

### **Forthcoming**

- Article Joy (Women's) Magazine – pending
- Country Women's Institute AGM Keynote Speaker, 2008
- Canterbury Plunket Mothers Presentation, 2008

## PUBLICATIONS WITHIN CANDIDATURE

### REFEREED JOURNAL ARTICLES

- Allan, J.K. & Doherty, M. (2004). Learning through work, discourse and participation: Storied lives, self and social - changing cultures. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 44(2), 158-178. University of South Australia.
- Allan, J.K. (2005). Farmers as learners: Evolving identity, disposition and mastery through diverse social practices. *Rural Society*, 15(1), 4-21. CRSR, Charles Sturt University, NSW., Australia.

### EDITED BOOK CHAPTERS

- Allan J.K. (2006). Integrating life, work and identity: Farm women transforming 'self' through personal struggle and conflict. In S. Billett, T. Fenwick & M. Somerville (Eds.), *Work, Subjectivity and Learning* (pp. 195-211). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Allan J.K. (Forthcoming, March, 2008). Farm women becoming and belonging; issues and tensions of transitions. In S. Billett, A. Etelapelto & C. Harteis (Eds.), *Emerging perspectives on learning through work*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

### REFEREED CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Allan, J.K. & Doherty, M. (2003). Identity, practice and culture: A narrative construction. *Proceedings of 11th Annual International Conference on Post-compulsory Education and Training*, Vol. 1, 1-7. Centre for Learning and Work Research, Griffith University, Queensland.
- Allan, J.K. (2005). Individual struggles for selfhood: Conflicts and tensions of transforming self within cultural worlds. *Proceedings of 13th Annual International Conference on Post-compulsory Education and Training*, Vol. 1, 1-8. Centre for Learning and Work Research, Griffith University, Queensland.
- Allan, J.K. (2007). What makes a successful farmer – a wife? Integrating life, work and identity: Farm women and men freaming different dreams. In Published *Proceedings of South Island Dairy Events Conference*, 'Making it happen' 18-20 June, 2007, (pp. 242-247). Lincoln University, Canterbury, NZ.

**Conference paper with presentation (prior to enrolment):**

Allan, J. (2002). Knowing in Practice: dispositions, knowledgeable identities and participation. *Proceedings of 10th Annual International Conference on Post-compulsory Education and Training. Vol. 1, pp. 53-60.* Griffith University, Centre for Learning and Work Research, Gold Coast, Queensland.