

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: LIVING IN A “MAN’S WORLD”

By

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ABSTRACT

Women in Agriculture: Living in a “Man’s World”

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Women in agriculture have long struggled to overcome the marginalization that stems from our patriarchal society. Despite their involvement, and they *are* involved, these women continue to be underrepresented, invisible, and experience barriers unlike those faced by males. The purpose of this study is to better understand women’s place and experiences in U.S. agriculture.

Three papers of my dissertation help to advance the research. First, a content analysis of imagery and text on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) website and social media was conducted to determine women’s representation by the federal agricultural agency. From analyzing over 361 photos from the USDA’s websites and social media, it was found that women were severely underrepresented in all categories examined: numerically, as the focus of the photo, and their depiction in agricultural roles. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with 56 women nonoperating landowners (WNOLs) to understand the power dynamics between them and their renter. Findings

revealed three primary groups of women: those who begrudgingly yielded power to their renter, those who were happy in their relationship and shared mutual power, and those who refused to yield their power. Each of these women and their unique experiences reveal the complexity and many nuances that exist within these relationships. Third, in-depth interviews were conducted with 73 WNOLs and 33 women learning circle staff to increase an understanding about barriers WNOLs face in agriculture, and a unique outreach method intended to assist with eliminating these barriers. The results suggest that WNOLs face barriers in terms of lack of knowledge and in renter relationships, but the outreach methods provide useful tools to build capital and help women face these barriers. Overall, these three studies advance the research on the experiences of women in agriculture.

(118 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Women in Agriculture: Living in a “Man’s World”

Ennea Fairchild

Despite women’s involvement in agriculture, their contributions have been overlooked in society. Women make up at least a third of those involved in agriculture as farmers, landowners, and in agricultural faculty positions. These numbers do not appear to be decreasing. Although there are several agricultural roles, this study focuses primarily on those women who own agricultural land, but do not farm the land themselves. Rather, these women rent it out to a farmer who operates the land for them (women nonoperating landowners or WNOLs, in short). Previous research suggests these women may be facing considerable barriers as an agricultural landowner and several gaps exist in research.

This dissertation contributes to this body of research through a series of three studies. I first begin by conducting an analysis of 361 photos posted on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) website and social media to determine how they are representing women in agriculture. In terms of the numbers of women portrayed, who is the focus of the photograph, and if women are portrayed in an agricultural role, the findings reveal that women are severely underrepresented in comparison to males. The second study compiles a series of interviews with WNOLs to understand power dynamics in terms of decision-making between the woman landowner and her farm operator, or renter (as they are referred to in this study). The findings reveal three groups of women:

those who are begrudgingly yielding their power to their renter; those who share power mutually; and those who refuse to yield power. Each of these groups of women reveal the many experiences facing WNOLs today. In the third study, interviews are conducted with WNOLs and agricultural agency women staff, both of whom have been involved in participating in a unique outreach method. This method helps provide women opportunities to increase their human, social, and cultural capital through engagement with one another and learning about various agricultural practices. Both groups of women are asked about the barriers they perceive WNOLs to be facing, along with what aspects of the outreach they feel are most beneficial in addressing these barriers. Results from this study suggest that women face considerable barriers to ownership, both from feeling they lack knowledge and with issues in their renter relationship. However, the outreach methods prove to be a powerful tool that help these women connect with one another and increase their knowledge about agricultural practices. Overall, these three studies help to advance the research on women in agriculture.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the U.S., women have long struggled to overcome marginalization and discrimination in male-dominated fields. Agriculture is no exception. Patriarchal institutions and norms continue to challenge the experiences of women in agriculture, despite their involvement in this field. And women *are* involved. Recent data finds that women make up over a third of those involved in agriculture as farm operators, landowners, faculty at 4-year universities, and in agriculture-related science careers (Beede et al. 2011; Griffeth et al. 2018; U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] 2014, n.d.). Griffeth et al (2018) cite 2013 data from the National Center for Education Statistics that reveals women have surpassed men in obtaining bachelor's degrees in agriculture. These numbers suggest that not only are women highly involved in this field currently, but that their numbers may continue to grow.

The purpose of my dissertation is to improve our understanding of the gendered challenges of women in agriculture. I first analyze women's representation on our nation's leading federal agricultural agency, the USDA. Pictures and text are examined to determine how often women are being represented, whether they are the focus of those photographs, and the roles for which they are portrayed. The next two papers focus specifically on one group of marginalized women in agriculture, nonoperating landowners. Here, 'nonoperating' refers only to those women who rent their land to a farm operator. My second paper expands on existing studies of land tenure theory to increase understanding of the power dynamics between women nonoperating landowners

(WNOLs) and their renter. The power dynamic nuances are explored in detail through an analysis of in-depth interviews with these women. The third paper examines perceptions of WNOLs and female agricultural agency staff who participated in the outreach method designed to assist WNOLs in facing gendered barriers. This paper examines both barriers and aspects of the outreach model that all women interviewed perceive as being useful in addressing barriers through gains in human, social, and cultural capital. Overall, these three papers advance the research on women in agriculture. In this introduction, I provide a review of the literature relevant to my overall research objective, then discuss the research methods used.

Literature Review

The history of agriculture in the U.S. is deeply rooted in the patriarchal structure of our society, which has long dictated the roles for which women in agriculture are recognized. Society portrays female roles as helpers, caregivers, and assistants in the agricultural sphere, rather than as leaders and breadwinners (Sachs 1983). Unlike these assumptions, however, women have long been involved in agriculture in a variety of ways, including roles that contradict these patriarchal norms. For example, the numbers of women farm and ranch operators have doubled between 1978 and 2007 (Hoppe and Korb 2013), with the most recent figures from the USDA showing that women fall just shy of 1,000,000, or 31% of American farmers (USDA n.d.). In addition to those women working the land (operators), women agricultural landowners comprise 37% of all principal¹ nonoperating landowners (USDA 2014). In a recent study on women leaders in

¹ 'Principal' here meaning the primary owner of the land.

agriculture, the authors find that 2008 data from the National Science Foundation identify only 35% of women encompassing agricultural faculty (or related fields such as biology or environmental sciences) positions at 4-year universities, but 2012 data from the National Center for Education Statistics find that women “outpaced men in the total number of bachelor’s degrees awarded in agriculture” (Griffeth et al. 2018, 1). Women in STEM² careers, specifically those in physical and life sciences (the most likely to comprise agriculture), have risen from 36 to 40% between 2000 and 2009 (Beede et al. 2011). These numbers show that not only are women making up at least a third of those in most agricultural fields, but that their numbers are continuing to grow, with women increasingly becoming involved in all aspects of agriculture.

Sachs (1983) argues that women play a critical role in agriculture, but that the institutionalization of a patriarchal society has prevented women from having the influence and power men do. Part of this institutionalized discrimination stems from our nation’s history of preventing women’s equal access to landownership through “restrictive property laws and custom” (Effland, Rogers, and Grim 1993, 237). The history of landownership rights explains how policies and laws preventing women’s access to agricultural land has marginalized them from early in our nation’s history.

In the eighteenth century, social norms dictated who would inherit land. Typically, it was the sons who would inherit land from their fathers, since daughters were less likely to farm the land (Sachs 1983). Even the institutions of that time prevented women from legal ownership. If the daughter were to marry, the property would become

² STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

that of her husband's (Sachs 1983). Research suggests that even after women were granted the right to own land independently of their husband (not until the mid-nineteenth century), because of custom, it took into the twentieth century for women to begin owning separate land (Effland, Rogers, and Grim 1993). Until around 1978, women were even forced to pay an estate tax on their land after their husband's passing, a tax that was not imposed on men (Effland, Rogers, and Grim 1993). These, and other laws and policies discriminated against women in terms of access to landownership.

As recently as 2012, the Supreme Court case of *Love v. Vilsack* finally reached a settlement in response to allegations of discrimination against women farmers by the USDA who were, "systematically denied application forms and loans [to women farmers], or [these women farmers] experienced other types of discrimination based on their gender or race," (Keller 2014, 76). According to Keller (2014), "government officials did not 'read' women... as farmers" (76).

While these women may have won the settlement, this does not necessarily mean the end of gender discrimination in agriculture. Studies find that social norms continue to marginalize women and keep them 'invisible' in agriculture (e.g. Eells 2008; Petzelka, Sorensen, and Filipiak 2018; Sachs 1983). Women's involvement has not "necessarily translated into improved gender relations in agriculture," (Sachs and Alston 2010, 286), with their involvement often underplayed or ignored (Sachs 1983). Agricultural conservation materials are found to use masculine imagery and language that has the potential to further alienate women, by reinforcing traditional gender roles (Eells 2008, 2010). Even women employed at agricultural agencies concede that the audience used in

their publications is often the “60-year old white men,” (Eells 2008, 121). Yet, as the numbers above show, women *are* involved in a variety of agricultural roles.

My dissertation focuses primarily on the experiences of WNOLs in the U.S. Research suggests that these women have experienced a variety of gendered barriers as landowners. Studies on WNOLs discuss women’s barriers to landownership, including inequitable power relationships between them and their renter (e.g. Carolan, 2005; Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), a lack of involvement in decision making on their land (Eells 2010; Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011; Rogers and Vandeman 1993; Salamon and Keim 1979; Women Food and Agriculture Network 2013), invisibility (Eells 2010; Eells and Soulis 2013; Petrzelka et al. 2018; Wells and Eells 2011), and gendered expectations that perpetuate the social norms that dictate men as the primary decision maker (Carter 2017).

Unequal power dynamics in agriculture creates barriers for women agricultural landowner’s in several ways. For example, much research on women nonoperating landowners suggests they may be less involved or less likely to make decisions about farm management than a male counterpart (Eells 2008; Effland et al. 1993; Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011; Rogers and Vandeman 1993). In part, this may be explained by Bigelow et al (2016) finding that approximately half (52%) of all women nonoperating landowners in the U.S. have never farmed. But, there is also evidence to suggest that gender bias may be a factor in excluding women’s participation in agriculture. Sachs (1983) studies women in agriculture more generally, not just landowners, and finds “the male bias operates to such an extent that women’s labor contribution to agriculture is not

recognized and when recognized is downplayed” (136). In terms of women agricultural landowners, a study by Eells (2008) suggests, “social constructs such as gender bias... create barriers to participation,” for these women (24). Here she is referring to participation in agricultural conservation, but this may be equally true for other aspects of female landownership, irrespective of conservation goals.

Women landowners are invisible landowners. In Eells (2010) and Eells and Soulis’ (2013) studies of women landowners in Iowa, they identify the lack of female representation in their examination of agricultural outreach documents and demographic information on these women on agricultural organization websites, illustrating how outreach materials fail to connect with women and only include technical language or information geared towards men (Eells 2010). Eells (2010) suggests, “this perpetuates a system of agricultural conservation wherein women remain outside their role as rightful decision makers for their land whether by hegemony or omission,” (183). Wells and Eells (2011) also conduct a county wide survey in Iowa to find that women are much more likely to rely upon a farm renter or manager to notice or act to solve problems on their land. In addition, they find that these women are often excluded and uninvited from participation in agricultural programs. Their findings reveal the need for women to be included in conservation education programs by valuing their input and needs, and embracing diversity (Wells and Eells 2011). Petrzelka et al (2018) add to these studies by addressing the invisibility of WNOLs in terms of the lack of data and federal policy. Through the use of survey and focus group data, they find that despite WNOLs feeling invisible, they are still trying and hungry to get information (Petrzelka et al. 2018).

Therefore, WNOLs desire inclusion and policy efforts need to be addressed to “get WNOLs on the radar” (Petrzelka et al. 2018, 10).

Gendered expectations are also found to challenge women’s experience as landowners. In Carter’s (2017) study of women farmland owners, gendered expectations in landownership are described as “how land should be used and by whom [as] communicated through cultural narratives and maintained through social interactions,” (Carter 2017, 499). These gendered expectations perpetuate men as the ultimate decision maker on land management. Findings reveal that among the 26 WNOLs she interviews, Carter (2017) finds that all the women exhibit characteristics that comply with gendered norms, but that 19 of the women identify acting at some point to resist these gendered norms. Despite, however, these intentions to resist, Carter (2017) concludes that these expectations remain largely unchanged, and suggests the importance of “alternative networks of information and support,” (Carter 2017, 521) that may encourage more women in agriculture to break out of these gendered expectations.

Learning circles are one alternative network that was first initiated by the Women, Food, and Agriculture Network (WFAN).³ These learning circles are geared towards educating women landowners through “flexible, peer-directed, facilitated learning experiences, built upon the idea that every member has something to contribute and that every member has something to learn,” (Women Food and Agriculture Network 2013, 4). The meetings begin with women introducing themselves and sharing any issues they may

³ WFAN “is a community of women in sustainable agriculture” with a mission to “engage women in building an ecological and just food and agricultural system through individual and community power” (WFAN 2018).

have regarding their land, followed by a technical discussion (often soil health related), and conclude with a field tour where the women travel to a local farm to see practices being implemented (Petrzelka et al. forthcoming). These programs are designed for women only and use an informal setting to help these women “find their voice and take action” as landowners (WFAN 2013, 4). This program was first piloted in 2009 in Iowa (WFAN 2013). Since that time, other organizations have adopted this method and have expanded these programs to reach women in multiple states.

Studies show that these learning circles may be helping women to be more involved in their land. A recent survey of women who have attended learning circles found that over half have acted in some way to improve conservation on their farmland (Carter et al. 2016). In addition, Petrzelka et al (forthcoming) interviews female attendees, finding that women’s actions after the meeting point towards empowerment through either increased knowledge, feeling of community with other women, or a recognition of their rights as a landowner.

In sum, research identifies that the patriarchal structure of our society has, and does, create considerable barriers for women in agriculture. Even though these studies contribute to an understanding of the situations of women in agriculture, several gaps remain. First, more needs to be understood about the ways in which women are being represented in agriculture. Aside from Eells (2008, 2010), studies that specifically examine how women are represented in agriculture have not been identified. In addition, an improved understanding of the power dynamics between women landowners and their male renter is needed, as noted by Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt (2011). Carter’s (2017)

study adds to this knowledge, but not in terms of land tenure theory and who holds the power in these relationships. Last, no study has been identified to examine the barriers identified by WNOLs and by the women professional staff who work closely with WNOLs through women's learning circles. It is my hope my research will begin to address these needs. In the following section, I outline my research design.

Research Design

The aim of my dissertation is to advance the research on women in agriculture in the U.S. through a series of three research papers.

Paper 1: The USDA and gender equity: Representation on the agency websites and social media. Prior research has identified that women are largely 'invisible' in agriculture (e.g. Eells 2010; Eells and Soulis 2013; Petrzalka et al. 2018; Wells and Eells 2011). However, aside from Eells' (2008, 2010) examination of imagery and text in publications, no study has looked at how women are being represented in agricultural agency websites and social media. This paper fills that gap by providing an understanding of the ways in which women in agriculture are being represented by the federal agency responsible for providing resources to them, the USDA. The research questions guiding this study asks: *how often and in what ways are women being represented on USDA agency websites and social media?*

To answer this question, I conduct a content analysis of photos identified on agency websites in September 2018, and all photos posted to the USDA's Facebook between September 1, 2017 and September 1, 2018. This resulted in 361 photos used in analysis. Three primary categories are the focus of this analysis: (1) number of females

and males depicted across all photographs; (2) who is the focus of these photographs and how are they depicted as such; and (3) the roles that these individuals are portrayed in.

The results of this analysis reveal key differences in terms of men and women representation on USDA websites and social media. This study identifies the current status of women's representation in agriculture, which provides the groundwork for the next two papers which look specifically at one group of women in agriculture: women nonoperating landowners. This article is prepared for submission to the journal, *Society and Natural Resources*, as a policy review.

Paper 2: Power and landownership: Dynamics at play between women agricultural nonoperating landowners and their renter. Historically, women have struggled to gain equal rights to agricultural property and “joint ownership” once meant it was only the man's property (Effland, Rogers, and Grim 1993). Even as recent as the late 1970s, women were forced to pay tax on inherited land from their husbands, a measure that did not apply to men (Effland, Rogers, and Grim 1993). While many of these formal restrictions no longer exist, this does not necessarily equate to women having power as landowners. In fact, research suggests that when it comes to power (as it relates to decision-making on the land), women are more likely to defer these decisions to the farm operator renting their land. The purpose of this study is to better understand the power dynamics and nuances that exist in women landowner-male renter relationships than currently exists in the research. The research questions guiding this study are: *What do the power dynamics between women nonoperating landowners and their farm renter look like? What are primary explanations for differences in these power dynamics?*

The methods used in this study involve in-depth interviews with 56 WNOLs located in the American Midwestern states of Indiana and Illinois. All women interviewed are nonoperating and rent their land to a farm operator. Analysis of the interviews determines who holds the power in these relationships, with “power” being determined by who is making the decisions over the land. The results of the interviews reveal three groups of women: (1) those who clearly yield power, albeit begrudgingly, to their renter; (2) those who appear to be happy with their renter and share power equally; and (3) those who are not yielding their power. This study reveals that although many women face challenges that prevent them from using their power as a landowner, there also exist women who are actively engaged through mutually shared power or through holding the power. This article is prepared for submission to the journal, *Rural Sociology*.

Paper 3: Benefits of outreach methods used to assist women agricultural landowners. For many WNOLs, landownership does not come without its challenges. According to several studies, WNOLs face significant barriers to landownership, including inequitable power relationships between them and their renter (Carolan 2005; Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), invisibility (Eells 2010; Eells and Soulis 2013; Petzelka et al. 2018; Wells and Eells 2011), and gendered expectations (Carter 2017). These barriers have the potential to influence these women’s abilities to uphold the values they ascribe to their land.

To address these barriers, a women’s learning circle was created by Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) as a resource that may be useful for providing these women with gains in their human, social, and cultural capital. These learning circles are

“flexible, peer-directed, facilitated learning experiences, built upon the idea that every member has something to contribute and that every member has something to learn” (WFAN 2013, 4). Each meeting has a ‘learning circle’ portion where the women share their story and network with other WNOLs and then an education portion where they gain technical knowledge and have the opportunity to visit a local farm to gain hands-on learning experience (Petrzelka et al. forthcoming).

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) identifying barriers WNOLs face, and (2) determining the most beneficial aspects of learning circles, in terms of capital gains, from the perspectives of WNOLs attendees of learning circles and the female agricultural staff who are involved in the learning circles. The research questions guiding this study asks: *How do WNOLs and women agricultural staff perceive the barriers facing WNOLs and in what ways are the learning circle methods useful for addressing these barriers?*

In-depth interviews with the two groups of women were conducted, with 73 WNOLs interviewed about their experiences, along with 33 women agricultural staff. All interviews are analyzed through a process of open coding, then shifted to a focused coding that more precisely identified the findings relevant to this study. From this analysis, I describe the top two most commonly identified barriers and most useful aspects of the meetings that were identified by both groups of women. The results show that WNOLs and staff identify the same barriers and have similar perspectives on what they deem as most useful from the meetings. These findings further lend themselves toward a more enhanced understanding of the situation facing WNOLs and the aspects of learning circles that may be most useful in addressing the challenges they face. Although

the learning circle method is not a solution for the structural barriers that stem from a patriarchal society, they do provide women with human, social, and perhaps some cultural capital to help in overcoming these barriers. This article is prepared for submission to the journal, *Agriculture and Human Values*.

Conclusion

Through a series of three studies, my dissertation provides a comprehensive picture of women's representation in agriculture, the power dynamics between WNOLs and their renter, and the barriers that WNOLs face and how learning circles may be useful in addressing these challenges. As addressed above, women in agriculture have long been subjected to marginalization. Although it is not easy to change patriarchal culture, the study findings may be used to implement policies and practices that address the structural issues identified in this research. These small steps may eventually lead to an improved situation for women in agriculture and a more equitable experience for these women.

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CHAPTER 2

THE USDA AND GENDER EQUITY: REPRESENTATION ON THE AGENCY WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

“Content of words and images is important, but so is packaging and presentation. Words matter, but images shape perception and may trump words because images help us confirm whether we are indeed seeing the same thing” (Wells and Eells 2011, 138A).

Women are becoming increasingly involved in a variety of agricultural roles in the U.S. Numbers of women farm and ranch operators have doubled between 1978 and 2007 (Hoppe and Korb 2013), with the most recent figures from the 2017 U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Census of Agriculture showing that women encompass 1.23 million or 36% of American farmers (USDA 2019). In addition to those working the land (operators), women agricultural landowners comprise 37% of all principal nonoperating landowners (USDA 2014). Women faculty in agriculture-related fields at 4-year universities represent 35% of positions, according to 2008 data from the National Science Foundation and National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (Griffeth et al 2018). In addition, research using 2015 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics find that women hold 23% of agricultural management positions in the U.S. (Griffeth et al 2018). Less data is available on the numbers of women in other agricultural roles, such as those employed in agricultural agencies in scientific or technical roles, although research on women in STEM⁴ careers finds that those in the physical and life

⁴ STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

sciences (the category most likely to comprise agriculture) have risen from 36 to 40% between 2000 and 2009 (Beede et al. 2011).

Despite these growing numbers, women in agriculture remain largely invisible (Eells 2008; Petrzelka, Sorensen, and Filipiak 2018; Sachs 1983). Women's involvement has "not necessarily translated into improved gender relations in agriculture," (Sachs and Alston 2010, 286), with their involvement often underplayed or ignored (Sachs 1983). Research finds agricultural conservation materials use masculine imagery and language that may further alienate women by reinforcing traditional gender roles (Eells 2008, 2010). Even women employed at agricultural agencies note that when deciding on the audience to use for publications, it is often the "60-year old white men," who remain the focus (Eells 2008, 121). Yet as the numbers above show, the reality is that women *are* involved in a variety of agriculturally-related roles, whether it be as an owner or operator of agricultural land, faculty member at a 4-year institution in an agricultural field, agricultural manager, or in an agriculture-related STEM career.

Aside from Eells (2008, 2010), studies that specifically examine how women are represented in agriculture have not been identified. To begin filling this gap, in this study I examine how women are being represented in all agricultural roles by the nation's leading federal agricultural agency, the USDA. I do so through an analysis of the imagery and text on USDA's website and primary social media outlet, Facebook. Recognizing the ways women are being represented by the USDA allows for an increased understanding of how women in agriculture, whom previous research has shown have been marginalized, are being depicted by the federal agency whose mission, according to the

Office of Advocacy and Outreach is to “coordinate[s] programs and outreach across USDA for several underserved groups of farmers and ranchers... recognizing the value of introducing women to agricultural jobs... and encourage[s] their participation in rural community and economic development” (U.S. Department of Agriculture n.d.).

In the following section I review existing literature on women’s representation in agriculture. I then describe the methods used for collecting and analyzing the imagery and text identified on the USDA’s website and Facebook, followed by the findings. I then discuss these findings and their implications for women in agriculture and policy.

Literature Review

I begin this literature review by discussing studies that examine women’s invisibility in agriculture, to better understand women’s underrepresentation. Sachs (1983) argues that women play a critical role in agriculture, but that the institutionalization of a patriarchal society has prevented women from having the influence and power men do (Sachs 1992). Her work provides detailed insight into the experiences of women in agriculture, including women farmers (Sachs 1983) and rural women (Sachs 1996) through the use of in-depth interviews. Her findings suggest that women are more involved with activities in rural areas than originally assumed, but they fail to be recognized for their contributions (Sachs 1996). In more recent work, she argues that even though women continue to be active in areas of sustainable agriculture, gender relations have not necessarily improved (Sachs and Alston 2010). Overall, Sachs’ work recognizes the invisibility that many women experience in this field (indeed, one of her books is titled ‘The Invisible Farmer’) and seeks to bring recognition to the important

role women play in agriculture.

In addition to Sachs, several other scholars have identified invisibility among women in agriculture (e.g. Carter 2015; Carter, Wells, Hand, and Soulis 2016; Eells 2008, 2010; Petrzelka et al. 2018; Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Trauger 2004; Wright and Annes 2016), with the research focus being on women farmers and women non-operating landowners. Most recently, Petrzelka, Sorensen, and Filipiak (2018) published a policy brief calling for women nonoperating agricultural landowners (WNOLs) to be put “on the radar.” They argue that “federal agricultural agencies/conservation agencies are not fulfilling their mandate to reach WNOLs” (Petrzelka et al. 2018, 1) and use focus group data to describe how these women face barriers, such as invisibility and difficulty obtaining information, from these agricultural agencies. For example, women in their study were quoted saying, *“I need concrete and actionable information, so I don’t get dismissed as unimportant when I call USDA,”* and, *“It is difficult to find out information about government conservation programs – there are inconsistencies between agencies, counties, genders”* (Petrzelka et al. 2018, 8).

Eells (2008, 2010) argues that agricultural agencies promote their programs and practices in a way that maintains men as the primary individual engaged in agriculture and fall short in representing women. Examining imagery and text in agricultural agency publications, Eells (2008, 2010) found a lack of women being portrayed in agricultural roles, specifically in materials that promoted conservation practices. She found not only was the material more likely to depict a male, it was also geared towards men by depicting “tools and equipment that are associated most strongly with men,” technical

language, and a “language that centers on profitability and is designed to appeal to men,” (Eells 2010, 183). In addition, Eells (2008) finds gender imbalances in agricultural staff, with fewer women in technical and leadership positions.

While this review shows previous studies have determined that women experience invisibility in agriculture, aside from Eells’ (2008, 2010) examination of imagery and text in publications, no study has looked at how women are being represented on agricultural websites and social media. My study seeks to fill the gap in research by providing an understanding of the ways in which women in agriculture are being represented by the federal agency USDA, responsible for providing resources to them. The research questions guiding this study asks: *How often and in what ways are women being represented on USDA agency websites and social media?*

Methods

To answer my research questions, I conduct a content analysis of photographs on federal agricultural agency websites and social media, focused on how often women are portrayed, how often they are the focus, and what are the roles in which they are portrayed. Neuman (2011) defines content analysis as a method to “gather and analyze the content of text” (361). Text can be anything from a website, to a film or photograph. In this study, the focus is exclusively on photographs and the still images on film links to determine total numbers of males and females, who is the focus, and their role in the photo. I also examine the corresponding text or captions that accompany each photo in order to ensure precise coding.

The USDA consists of 29 agencies. Only those agencies that provide agriculture

programs and services to communities throughout the U.S. were analyzed. Out of the 29 agencies, three have been selected, including the USDA itself, the Farm Service Agency (FSA), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The mission of the FSA's office of Office of Program Education and Stakeholder Engagement "is to increase the participation of customers in FSA programs with targeted marketing activities to those who are underserved," which they specify as including women (FSA n.d.a). NRCS is a USDA agency whose Outreach and Advocacy Division is "to provide leadership to ensure that all programs and services are made accessible to all NRCS customers, fairly and equitably, with emphasis on reaching the underserved and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers and landowners" (NRCS n.d.b).

Each of these three agency websites contain four to seven main menus at the top, often highlighted in a bold print or colored background. For example, the main menus of FSA's website include: Home, Programs and Services, State Offices, Online Services, and Newsroom (FSA n.d.c). Within each of these main menus, except for 'Home' and 'State Offices,' there are drop-down lists of the sub-topics. The numbers of these sub-topics vary from a small few, to a large list of 30 or more. In this content analysis, photographs were collected from each main menu, and from each of the sub-topics that are listed below. Each sub-topic was clicked once and only the first webpage displayed was used for analysis. In many of these websites, the 'Home' menu repeats the topics addressed elsewhere, so any duplicate photographs were not examined. The small menus in the upper right-hand corner of the agency's 'Home' page were also clicked on once and examined for photographs. These are often in small print and contain topics such as:

‘About FSA,’ ‘Ask FSA,’ and ‘Contact Us’ (FSA n.d.c).

In addition to the agency websites, photographs on the USDA’s Facebook page were also analyzed. Since the FSA and NRCS are under the umbrella of the USDA, their Facebook pages link to the overall USDA page. Facebook has been considered the “most widely used [social networking site]... with 93% of online U.S. adult users reporting having a Facebook account” (Hale, Pathipati, Zan, and Jethwani 2014, 2). This study analyzed all photographs posted to the USDA’s Facebook page between September 1, 2017 and September 1, 2018. These photographs, along with the photographs obtained from the websites of the FSA, NRCS, and USDA were used for analysis.

Since websites change often, it was necessary to ensure all photographs were retained for coding purposes. To accomplish this, screenshots were taken and all photographs were numbered. Similar to previous studies used to analyze gender in photographs, all photographs that use children as the primary subject have been eliminated from analysis (Bujaki and McConomy 2010) and only those that depict adults who appear to be 18 years or older are included.

After collecting all photographs, a categorization matrix was created. This process allows for organization of the results into categories and codes within each identified category, according to what was analyzed, a method used by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). In this approach, the categorization matrix can be either unconstrained or structured and breaks main categories into a generic category and sub-category (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). For this study, an unconstrained matrix was used, which allowed for the creation of new categories according to the trends identified while coding. Additional research by

Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013) supports this way of organizing the results by suggesting, “a content analysis ‘breaks’ a picture into a number of attributes (or categories) guided by what is depicted on a photo” (3). Bujaki and McConomy’s (2010) study analyzing gender representation in photographs of corporate annual reports include a variety of categories, including: the number of times women and men are portrayed; their portrayal as being a person of authority from being active or passive (determined by factors such as whether they are talking, looking at the camera, or the focus of attention in the photo); and the individual’s role. In order to focus solely on the numbers, focus, and roles of women in these photographs, classifications similar to the seven-category coding scheme used by Bujaki and McConomy (2010) were combined to create these three categories.

Previous content analyses organize photographs in terms of their male to female dynamic (Bujaki and McConomy 2010). The following three category coding scheme, based off of Bujaki and McConomy (2010), was used to find if males or females are more prevalent in the photograph. The first category is *numbers*. Here, “the number of females/males,” is a count of how many of each gender were depicted across all photographs. The second category, “who is being represented” was coded as either: (1) Male only, (2) More male than female, (3) Equally represented, (4) More female than male, (5) Female only, (6) Unknown, and (7) Mixed. ‘Unknown’ was used for photographs where the individuals are indistinguishable as male or female, and ‘mixed’ was for photographs of a large crowd of people where the numbers are mixed and there are no specific individuals as the focal point.

The second category is *focus* and includes who is the focus of the photograph (the

primary individual), and how that individual is depicted as the focus. “Female/male as focus” determines who is the focus of the photograph and can be coded as either the male or female as the primary individual, or both as the primary individual. This helps identify the ‘lead’ individual who is the most prominent subject in the photograph. In some cases, a male and a female are both shown smiling at the camera. These were coded as both the male and female as the primary focus. However, in some photographs with both a male and female, there may only be one individual who is the focus. For example, one gender may be talking, while the other is the onlooker. These were coded as either male or female focused, with the individual speaking being coded as the primary individual. This strategy is based on the work of Bujaki and McConomy (2010), who uses the terms “female, male, or balanced representation” (125).

Those who are the focus of the photograph are then coded to according to how they are depicted as the focus. This determines how the primary individual of the photograph is signified. Bujaki and McConomy (2010) use the distinction between individuals who are passive and active. The term ‘passive’ denoting those who are not actively involved with what is happening in the photograph, versus ‘active,’ those who are performing the action in the photo. In this study, these two terms are expanded into five sub-categories: middle, focus, foreground, action, and talking. *Middle* is the individual in the center of the photograph. *Focus* refers to photos where an individual is in focus while others may be out of focus, clearly depicting them as the primary individual. Pictures with only one individual are all coded as ‘focus.’ *Foreground* refers to individuals who are shown up close in the photograph, while the others are in the

background. These first three sub-categories are all ‘passive’ terms, whereas the remaining two are ‘active’ terms. *Action* means that they are performing an action that others are observing (e.g., driving a tractor, digging in the soil), and *talking* refers to any photo where the primary individual is speaking (e.g., open mouth indicating they are talking or gesturing with their hand). Each of these categories are used to understand not only who is being shown in the photograph, but who the primary focus is and how they are depicted.

The third category is *roles*. “Female/male’s roles” are used to specify the primary individuals’ role in the photo. Similar to previous studies that code each individual in the photograph separately (Heuer, McClure, and Puhl 2011), the focus is exclusively on the primary male and female of each photograph to determine their role. To ensure accuracy in these results, two separate rounds of coding were conducted. The first round was based off first impressions from the photograph. For example, an individual who is shown driving a tractor was coded as ‘farmer.’ Since this first round left room for misinterpretation, I completed a second round of coding that used clues from captions and other descriptions of the photograph to determine the individual’s role. If no description existed, I took clues identified in the photograph to determine the individual’s role. Roles that were identified through this process include: agency representative roles, agriculture roles, or civilian roles.

Individuals coded in ‘agency representative’ roles were either identified as such from the photo description, shown wearing attire (e.g., hat, shirt) with the agency logo, in an agency setting wearing professional attire, a speaker at an agency event, an appointed

or elected agency official, or as a leader for an agency event. ‘Agriculture’ roles include: farmer, rancher, and other roles (which included a plant breeder and crop adjuster). If the photo’s description did not clarify the individual’s role, yet they were portrayed in a farm setting (e.g., sitting on a tractor, in an animal pasture, or barn) they were coded as a ‘farmer.’ If the person’s exact role could not be determined, they were coded as ‘civilian.’ Since the focus of this paper are those represented in agricultural roles, this category is excluded from the findings.

All photographs were coded three times by the primary coder to ensure accuracy in the coding. I detail the findings below.

Results

The results of my analysis show key differences in terms of men and women representation on USDA websites and social media. I first discuss the numbers of men and women across all photographs, followed by the results of who is the focus, and how they are depicted.

Numbers

A total of 361 photographs were analyzed. The one-click technique used on the agency websites resulted in 26 photos from the USDA’s website, 36 from NRCS, and 24 from the FSA’s site. The remaining 275 photos are from the USDA’s Facebook page. Forty photographs were coded as ‘unknown’ or ‘mixed’ and did not have a primary individual as the focus, thus were eliminated from further analysis, leaving an N of 321

photographs.⁵ In terms of raw numbers of individuals portrayed across all photos, 268 women and 465 men were identified. Out of these photos, 49% (n = 157) depict only males (Table 2.1), 10% (n = 31) more males than females, and 10% (n = 34) equally represent both males and females (n = 34). This is compared to only 3% (n = 10) of photos that depict more females than males and 28% (n = 89) of the photos that depict only females.

Table 2.1: Gender breakdown in photographs.

Who is represented	Number of photographs (N = 321)	Percent of total
Male only	157	49
More males than females	31	10
Equally represented	34	10
More females than males	10	3
Female only	89	28

Focus

It is not enough to simply examine the numbers of how many women are being shown in photographs. Thus, I detail here who is the focus in the photo (male, female or equal representation), and their depiction as either active or passive.

The analysis reveals that 61% of the primary individuals in the photographs are males, 30% are females, and 8% focus equally on the male and female in the photo (Table 2.2).

Men are approximately twice as likely as women to be the primary individual. In addition, men are four times more likely to be portrayed as active. In terms of the total

⁵ In Table 2.1, I focus exclusively on the three categories that make up the bulk of the findings. The remaining photographs were either coded as 'More male than female' (n = 31) or 'More female than male' (n = 10).

numbers of men and women who are depicted as the primary individual in the photograph, these results reveal that women are much more likely than men to be depicted as passive than active. In fact, out of the 97 photos of women depicted as the primary individual, only 23 photos show as active. This is compared with the 197 photos of men being depicted as the primary individual, where 103 depict him as active.

Table 2.2: Males versus females as the primary individual and their depiction as either active or passive.

Gender	Primary Individual in Photograph (N = 321)	Percent†	Active (n = 134)	Passive (n = 187)
Male	197	61	103	94
Female	97	30	23	74
Equally males and females	27	8	8	19

†These do not add up to 100% because they were rounded to the nearest percent.

One example of a woman shown as active is on the USDA's Facebook page, where a young female is speaking at a podium with a male sitting behind her listening. Another from NRCS's website shows two women (one a farmer and one an agency representative) examining hay in a pasture with cows in the background. A majority of photos depicting women as passive show them in a farm setting. For example, on FSA's website a middle-aged woman stands in jeans and a button up shirt with her young goat. She is smiling at the camera and standing outdoors in front of animal pens. On NRCS's website, another middle-aged woman passively stands in a corn field, smiling at the camera, and wearing a button-up shirt.

Role

My analysis also reveals the roles for which these women are most often

portrayed. As shown in Table 2.3, the roles for which men and women are depicted on the federal agency websites and Facebook reveal several key differences.

Table 2.3: Roles of primary individuals in photographs.

Role (N = 236)	Men (n = 156)	Percent	Women (n = 80)	Percent
Agency representative roles (n = 177)	113	64	64	36
Agricultural roles (n = 59)	43	73	16	27

Discussion and Conclusions

In the words of Wells and Eells (2011), “*Words matter, but images shape perception and may trump words because images help confirm whether we are indeed seeing the same thing*” (138A). The results of this study find that women are represented less than men in federal agricultural agency imagery in terms of numbers, focus, and role. There are twice as many photographs depicting only males than those depicting only females. In addition, men are twice as likely as women to be the focus of the photograph and four times more likely than women to be shown as active. Men are also twice as likely to be represented in an agency role and almost three times as likely than women to be in an agricultural role. This is consistent with the work of Eells (2008) who finds actual gender imbalances in agricultural staff, with fewer women in technical and leadership positions.

These findings help underscore the need for women to be equally represented in agricultural imagery. The vast difference in these findings by gender is discriminatory. For women in agriculture, this lack of visual representation of women may contribute to them feeling less included, accepted, or comfortable in these roles. The USDA must be

aware of the imagery it is using, in addition to providing more inclusive imagery. It must represent all Americans equitably, regardless of gender, race, class or other demographic characteristics. Although it is not the focus of this paper, these findings also reveal that of all individuals portrayed in these images whose race could be distinguished as ‘white’ or ‘not white,’ only 20% are ‘not white’ individuals.⁶ Future papers may want to delve into these racial dynamics.

The FSA has created programs that are intended to “target a portion” of loan funds towards “historically underserved farmers and ranchers,” that they specify to include women, along with certain racial groups (FSA n.d.b). While these programs are important, they highlight the need for institutional change that advances the equitable representation of women as potential leaders and players in agriculture, not just as the ‘underserved,’ invisible individual. Women need to be seen and heard in order to become leaders. It is time for our agricultural institutions to invite these women into the conversation.

This study reveals several opportunities for future research. While these findings contribute to an understanding of how women are represented, it would also be useful to know other positions that women in agriculture hold. For example, many USDA agencies have local offices which rely on board members to make hiring decisions. Examining the number of women on these boards may be useful for understanding their representation locally. I assume these numbers of women are low, and in order to add diversity to the traditional white male perspective in agriculture, women’s representation in these more

⁶ A total of 758 individuals were coded as either white or not white. Out of this total, 610 were coded as white and 148 were coded as not white.

influential positions must improve.

This study details women's representation on USDA agency websites and social media to a greater extent than any previous study. This study not only looks at the raw numbers of women's representation, but also examines whether they are the primary individual and their role. The findings reveal that much can be done to improve women's representation in agriculture. This is a call to action for the USDA to represent women equally in terms of the imagery and text used by them in order to fulfill their mission to serve all people in agriculture.

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CHAPTER 3

POWER AND LANDOWNERSHIP: DYNAMICS AT PLAY BETWEEN WOMEN AGRICULTURAL NONOPERATING LANDOWNERS AND THEIR RENTER

Introduction

“This is family land. It’s been in my family for seven generations last year. This is the first time this farm has been farmed in this manner and I’m gonna get it back to a more responsible approach to farming, that’s my goal. It’s just a general shift in my thinking and a determination to take my land in a direction that I’m gonna go, because after all it is my land (emphasis added).” (Judy)

Historically, women have struggled to gain equal rights to agricultural property, and “joint ownership” once meant it was only the man’s property (Effland, Rogers, and Grim 1993). It was not until the nineteenth century that a woman could own property separate from her husband (Effland et al. 1993). In terms of inherited property, up until 1981 women were subject to tax laws that prevented equal access to inherited land that men were not subject to (Sachs 1983). While these formal restrictions no longer exist for women landowners, this has not necessarily equated to women having power over their land. When examining power as it relates to decision-making on the land, scholars find that women landowners are more likely to defer these decisions to the farm operator who rents their land, whereas male landowners are more likely to be involved in the decision making (Bigelow, Borchers, and Hubbs 2016; Effland et al. 1993; Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011; Rogers and Vandeman 1993). As will be shown, given women own a quarter of agricultural land being rented, this poses a concern about potential landowner-renter power dynamics that may be at play. Although existing studies have

revealed the complications that exist in these relationships, the purpose of this study is to delve much more into the power dynamics and nuances between women nonoperating landowners (WNOLs) and their male farm renter than previous literature.

Understanding these dynamics as fully as possible is important for various reasons. First, in the U.S., 39% of the 911 million acres of farmland is being rented, and of that, 80% is owned by a nonoperating landowner (Bigelow et al. 2016), landowners who “own land, but do not farm it themselves” (Ulrich-Schad et al. 2016: 602). This includes those renting their land to a farm operator. Women make up 37% of this nonoperating landowner category and out of the farmland being rented, 25% is owned by a woman principalⁱ nonoperating landowner (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] 2014). In addition, women nonoperating landowners rent their land at a higher rate than males (Bigelow et al. 2016). These numbers, along with recent studies suggesting the number of women landowners may actually be higher (Petrzelka, Sorensen, and Filipiak 2018), make it important to understand how women navigate their role as a landowner in the patriarchal field of agriculture. This understanding will contribute to the existing, albeit limited, number of studies that examine WNOLs in the U.S.

In-depth qualitative interviews of women landowners in Indiana and Illinois are conducted to better understand the power dynamics and nuances that exist in women landowner-male renter relationships than currently exists in the research. In the following sections, the existing literature on women landowners is examined in more detail, followed by a description of the research methods.

Literature Review

While landownership in capitalist societies often implies power, research have conflicting perspectives on this. For example, neo-Marxist sociologist, Mooney (1983) argues in support of this idea, stating the economic power of the landowner means that as a capitalist, “he controls the labor power of others” (577). According to Mooney’s (1983) theoretical model, the ‘tenant’ falls between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, meaning they have somewhere between “no control over production processes” to “control [over the] means of production” (577). Landowners, on the other hand, fall between the petty bourgeoisie and the capitalist in that they have control over various aspects of production, including investment and accumulation, the means of production, and the labor power of others (Mooney 1983).

Harris (1974) describes two forms of control in terms of organizational and operational decisions. Organizational decisions tend to deal more with economic ownership over investment and lease-making decisions, whereas operational tend to deal more with land use decisions (Harris 1974). Like Mooney, Harvey (1982) also takes a Marxist approach, but unlike Mooney’s (1983) suggestion that landowners have control over production, or operational decisions, Harvey posits that because landowners are not involved with the actual production processes and simply collect rent money, that they forfeit control.

These theories may be further strengthened by incorporating Granovetter’s theory of embeddedness, which suggests the importance of social ties in economic relationships (Granovetter 2001). Granovetter (2001) argues that “behavior and institutions to be

analyzed are so constrained by ongoing social relations that to construe them as independent is a grievous misunderstanding” (51). In other words, to better understand the economic exchange between (in this case) landowners and their renter, social relations must be considered. Embeddedness stresses the “role of concrete personal relations ... in generating trust and discouraging malfeasance” (57). According to Granovetter (2001), strong social ties between actors are necessary for effective exchange and purposive action in these economic relationships.

The embeddedness of social relations within economic relationships, may be useful for understanding the complex power dynamics that exist between WNOLs and their male renter. It may be false to assume that a landlord’s position presupposes more power than a renter, especially when it comes to decision-making, without factoring in the social relations. Scholars of land tenure have debated over these landlord-renter relationship power dynamics for decades. As discussed above, one view suggests the prevalence of dominant landlord-subordinate renter relationships, where the landlord maintains the power and decision-making capabilities on the land (Mooney 1983). This idea is supported by Salamon (1995), who finds that women landowners who have inherited land maintain the power over it. Although she does not specifically mention the role of a renter in this situation, she mentions power by “controlling others’ lives and influencing the course of events,” which suggests the landowner holds the power over the land (Salamon 1995: 14).

Other researchers, however, have found a dominant renter-subordinate landlord relationship, where the renter is the ultimate decision-maker and the landlord is content

with this arrangement (Constance, Rikoon, and Ma 1996; Gilbert and Beckley 1993). Despite this mutual agreement, however, this does not necessarily mean that power dynamics are not at play. Gilbert and Beckley (1993) suggest the possibility that vulnerable groups, such as “retired farmers, small landowners, [or] widows,” may be more likely to experience coercion from the renter and suggest that future studies examine these dynamics (578). This suggests that social relation nuances may influence the power dynamics at play between these two actors.

Studies exploring the experiences of women landowners lend support to the idea of a dominant renter-subordinate landlord relationship. These studies suggest that women landowners may be less involved in decision-making than male landowners or their male renter (e.g. Bigelow et al. 2016; Eells 2008, 2010; Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011; Rogers and Vandeman 1993; Salamon and Keim 1979; Women, Food and Agriculture Network [WFAN] 2013). Researchers suggest this may stem from women’s lack of power with their renter (Carolan 2005; Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), or societal gendered expectations placed on women landowners (Carter 2017). In Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt’s (2011) study in the Great Lakes Basin, both female landlords and male landlords were asked about their level of participation in decision-making on their land (their measure of power). The findings reveal that gender may play a critical role in these landlord-renter dynamics, and that female landlords “appear to have the least power [as compared to male landlords] due to their relationship with their tenantⁱⁱ, their relationship with their siblings, or a combination of these situations,” (Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011: 558), again suggesting a dominant renter-subordinate landlord situation.

A recent study by Carter (2017), of 26 women farmland owners in Iowa, reveals these power dynamic nuances as they relate to gendered expectations. While Gilbert and Beckley (1993) and Mooney (1983) focus on the economic forces that occur in a landowner-renter relationship, Carter's focus is on cultural narratives, especially when it comes to women landowners. She argues gendered expectations that stem from cultural narratives essentially determine who in society has power over the land and how it is used. Therefore, the cultural narratives "privileging male control of land" mean that women landowners are expected to be "placeholders," who maintain the land as "profitable and viable so it can be passed on to the next generation," and defer their decision-making to their male renter or co-owner, complying with gendered norms in the patriarchal structure, despite landownership and legal power (Carter 2017: 504). Carter notes "placeholders" are not entirely passive and still make some decisions when it comes to leasing arrangements with their renter. For example, she describes the story of Paula, a 70-year old landowner who is involved in discussions about the land, but cedes her decision-making to her brother who farms the land.

"Changemakers" are women landowners who resist the gendered expectations of a "placeholder," that prioritizes man's power (Carter 2017). Yet, Carter (2017) finds that even though 19 out of the 26 women interviewed expressed intentions to be a "changemaker," they did so often through "surreptitious compromise," such as implementing a change in secret, after someone died, or at a slower pace than they might otherwise prefer (514). For example, some of these 19 women deemed "changemakers" in her study mentioned that they would wait until a family member or spouse passed

away before making specific changes on or regarding the land, such as implementing conservation practices. In contrast to implicit action, some women took more explicit action, by firing their renter or altering their use of the farmland to more sustainable practices. Carter's study begins to get at the differences among women landowners, reveals the gendered expectations experienced by women agricultural landowners, and ways in which they may either succumb to, or resist, these expectations.

In addition to gender being a barrier in the interactions between women landowners and their male renter, research identifies other factors that may also impact the relationship. For example, the type of lease arrangement (e.g. crop share or cash rent) may factor into the landlord-renter power dynamic. According to Bigelow et al. (2016) and data from the Census of Agriculture's 2014 Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey, cash rent agreements are the most common among all nonoperating landowners, but the numbers specifically for WNOLs are not provided (USDA Census of Agriculture 2014). However, data from Iowa reveals that cash rent is used by 77% of women landowners who lease their land, as opposed to crop share agreements (Duffy and Johanns 2014; WFAN 2013). Crop share agreements typically involve shared decision-making, benefits, and risks between the renter and landowner, whereas cash rent implies that the renter pays to use the land, makes all decisions, and is responsible for all risks and benefits that may incur (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), thus giving the renter more power. Rogers and Vandeman (1993) find that landlords using a cash rent agreement, regardless of gender, tend to be less involved in management decisions. Carter's study fails to incorporate or at least discuss lease

arrangements, while other studies were unable to find a statistical relationship between a landowner's lease agreement and their involvement in decision making (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011).

In addition to the lease agreement, a landowner's relationship with their renter as either a family member, friend of the family, or local farmer may also factor into the power dynamics in the relationship. In Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt's (2011) study of absentee (those who live off their land) nonoperating landowners, they find that women who have a local renter, rather than a family member or friend of family, are less likely to be involved in decision-making. Carter's (2017) study of women landowners finds that many of the women "placeholders" feel obligated to defer their decision-making capabilities to either male renters or male co-owners, regardless of their personal relationship.

The research also suggests that the challenges experienced by these women may differ based on demographics. Age is one factor. Research suggests that younger female landowners may be more involved in land ownership decision-making than older female landowners (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011; Rogers and Vandeman 1993). This poses potential challenges, considering data from the TOTAL survey found that 66% of female nonoperating principal landowners are over the age of 65ⁱⁱⁱ (USDA Census of Agriculture 2014). Inheritance is a second factor. Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt's (2011) findings suggest that female landowners may be less likely to make decisions if they inherited the land, rather than purchased it.

Ownership status is another area that may create differing challenges among

women landowners. Literature finds that some women may be more reliant on their co-owner to actively engage in decision-making for the land and communication with their farmer (Carter 2017). For example, women who co-own the land with siblings are found to be less involved in decisions than those who do not co-own with a sibling (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), perhaps due to having a male sibling as a co-owner. Finally, a woman's residence on the land may also factor into the challenges they experience, with research suggesting that absentee landowners (male and female) may be less involved in decision-making than those who live on their land (Constance et al. 1996; Petrzelka, Ma, and Malin 2013).

Jackson-Smith and Petrzelka (2014) find, "many scholars continue to assume that landownership is an obvious source of power in social and economic relationships, but the empirical evidence from recent studies suggests that power relationships between landlords and tenants are more nuanced," (64). As Carter (2017: 507) states, "Landownership is complicated." In addition to power dynamics that are at play between landowners and renters economically, it is also important to factor in the social ties between these two actors.

The purpose of this study is to build upon the existing research by examining more specifically the power dynamics between WNOLs and their farm renter. The research questions are: *What do the power dynamics between women nonoperating landowners and their farm renter look like? What are primary explanations for differences in these power dynamics?* In the following section, the research methods used for this study are outlined.

Methods

The women landowners in this study were participants of learning circles conducted by American Farmland Trust (AFT 2018).^{iv} In 2012, AFT began to focus on women agricultural landowners after recognizing the work of the WFAN^v in Iowa with women only learning circles. The goal of learning circles is to educate, support, connect, and empower women agricultural landowners (and farmers) to make sustainable land management decisions (Women4theLand n.d.).

A comprehensive list of women attendees to learning circles in Indiana and Illinois from 2014 to 2017 was used as the study population. The list of attendees included their addresses, email, and telephone contact information. Not every attendee provided information for each of these contact modes, but a majority provided email addresses and telephone numbers.

An initial email was sent to each woman attendee from their learning circle facilitator, where the women were informed of the purpose of the study and provided notice that they would be contacted by the author via email or telephone in the upcoming weeks to schedule a telephone interview. This email gave women the opportunity to reply directly to their learning circle facilitator to schedule an interview. For those women who did not respond to the initial email, two more attempts were made via email. For any emails that were returned as undeliverable, and the attendee had not provided telephone information, the contact was noted as undeliverable and eliminated from the study population list. If there were three failed attempts via email, but a telephone number was provided, then three attempts were made via telephone. Any contact's number that was

no longer in service was eliminated from the list. In instances when the participant was reached, some women were willing to be interviewed immediately, whereas in other situations, an interview was scheduled for an upcoming date and time. Prior to the interview, respondents were informed of this study's purpose and were asked for their consent to be voice recorded. If they preferred not to be recorded, detailed notes were taken. If they provided consent, then the interview was recorded and transcribed to ensure accurate data collection.

All interviews were conducted between August 2016 and October 2017. The three waves of emails took place between August 2016 and January 2017. The three waves of telephone calls were conducted from November 2016 through April 2017. During the second half of 2017, AFT provided additional contacts who attended meetings in 2016 or early 2017. These women were contacted using the same modes and methods described above, between July and October of 2017. After removing the women on the study population list who were not landowners or who did not have accurate contact information, an N of 218 women remained. Of these, 130 were interviewed, for a final response rate of 60%.

For this study, the focus is solely on the women landowners who identify as nonoperating and currently rent their land to a farm operator. Seventy-three of the women (56% of the total N) interviewed constitute this category. 'Power' is determined by who is making the decisions over the land. If the landowner is the primary decision-maker, then they are the ones holding the power over their land, and vice versa. Seventeen interviews were eliminated because there was not enough information to discern the

power dynamics in their renter relationship, resulting in a total of 56 interviews used in this analysis.

The average length of each interview was about a half hour. The interviews involved open-ended questions, to allow for detailed responses and insight (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006). Using the interview transcripts, each sentence was first coded to determine any themes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). After the first round of coding, the coders shifted to a focused coding process which more precisely identified any findings relevant to the study (Emerson et al. 2011). Three coders analyzed the interview transcripts, with one coder coding once and two coders coding three times, using both inter-coder and intra-coder checking to ensure accuracy of the results. Any discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved by the coders. The dominant themes relevant to the research questions are presented here.

Results

In terms of various characteristics, the average age of the women in this study is 68 years old, with ages ranging from 49 to 92 years (Table 3.1). This average age aligns with TOTAL survey data finding that a majority of female nonoperating landowners are over the age of 65 (USDA Census of Agriculture 2014). The majority of the women are the sole owner of the land, have inherited land from family, and live on the land being farmed. In terms of lease arrangement, 34 women described using a cash rent lease with their renter, the dominant type of lease among nonoperating landowners regardless of gender (Bigelow et al. 2016).

Table 3.1: Categories of Interview Participants (N = 56).

Landowner characteristics	Means and Frequency ^a
Age	Average 68 years old; Range 49 – 92
Landownership status ^b	
Sole	33
Co-owner with spouse	12
Co-owner with family	10
Land acquisition	
Inherited from family	30
Inherited from spouse	9
Residence	
On-land	33
Off-land	22
Lease arrangement	
Cash rent	34
Crop share	16
Male Renter	56

^a Categories not including all 56 women were those who either did not provide a response or were coded as ‘other.’

^b One woman told us she is the sole owner of some parcels and the co-owner with her husband on others, therefore she is counted in both ‘sole’ and ‘co-owner with spouse’ categories. Two women did not reveal their landownership status.

To answer the research questions, *what do the power dynamics between women nonoperating landowners and their farm renter look like and what are primary explanations for differences in these power dynamics*, the women were asked to describe their relationship with their renter, and their satisfaction with it. Bases on their responses, three primary groups of women were identified. One group of women clearly yield power, albeit begrudgingly, to their renter. A second group are those who appear to be happy with their renter relationship, and power appears to be shared equally. A third group are those women not yielding power to their renter. In the following section, each

of these themes are explored further.

Yielding Power

The majority of women (n = 30) in this study yield power to their male renter, by allowing their renter to make the primary land management decisions. Yielding of power occurs primarily by renters' resisting suggestions from the women and the women not pushing for change (in terms of having their renter implement desired practices on their land).

For example, Donna is a 68-year old sole landowner living on her land that she inherited from her family. Donna says she has discussed implementing new conservation practices on her land with her renter, saying, *"I actually talked to him about cover crops... and he didn't seem to think it was economically feasible to have them here. And he was not too interested in doing that... he was familiar with it, but he didn't want to do it. He said it wouldn't be worth it."*

Susan (age 70) co-owns land with her husband. They live off the farm and have a father and son who operate the land for them. Susan details how she also tried talking to her renters about implementing cover crops, saying, *"I certainly told the young farmer that I had gone to this thing [learning circle], and... I did a whole thing about, 'well did you know [about cover crops]?' And he went through, 'you know, we're so far north, it's hard to get the plants established' And, 'it's a lot.' So he continues to have his reasons for not doing it."* Later she says of both renters, *"They didn't tell me to sit down or shut up, so they did at least listen to me."*

The women also acknowledge they do not push their renter. For example, Sally is

a 71-year old landowner who co-owns family land with her sister and lives off the land. Her renter managed the land for their parents and has been with the farm for approximately 20 years. She describes their relationship, *“We trust and respect our farmer very much. ... Cover crops and things like that, it’s not really an option for us because of what he’s doing. ... We are just done wanting to be demanding. We want to keep the same relationship [as our parents did], but ... when he does retire, perhaps we’ll be a little bit more aggressive.”*

Sandra is 62-years old and inherited her farm from her late father. She is the sole owner of her land and has used the same renter for over forty years. Even though she notes that her father tried to set up a good renter situation before his passing, there remain some issues. She states, *“I have discovered along the way that a 40-year relationship is a good and a bad thing. It has been a growth process for me the last 10 years. ... Perhaps I was not as best prepared as I should have been, but nonetheless often time life happens. ... As far as my tenant... hardworking, industrious, honest, I hope. Communication is lacking as far as from my perspective. Not that I want to be your best friend, but it seems like more often than not the communication has to be initiated by me. ... It’s just a fine line to walk. How much is as far as me being the landlord? How much is too much?... There are certain areas where, like the year-end report, stuff like that should be forth coming from them and I have yet to receive one. Now have I pushed the point? No.”*

In their discussion regarding why they yield power, two primary reasons for doing so emerge: complicated renter relationship dynamics and the women’s perceived lack of knowledge about farming practices.

Complicated renter relationship dynamics are the most common reason. For some women, it may be their renter is a neighbor, family member, family friend, or a long-term renter who was ‘inherited’ when the women received the land. Donna, introduced earlier, when discussing communication issues with her renter, describes why she yields to him. *“I don’t know if I should tell him that I want to talk to him once a month, or how to handle that because he’s a neighbor. And I don’t want to, you know, upset him. I don’t think he would get angry, but I’m not exactly sure.”* The quote shows how Donna’s relationship is complicated by the fact that her renter is a neighbor and she does not want to cause tension in their relationship.

Sandra also discusses how having a long-term renter, inherited from her father and also a family friend, is impeding on the changes she would like to make to her farm management approach, saying, *“This is a 40-year relationship and the time will come when my farm attendant will retire and I will have to have a new tenant, and my approach to doing farm business will likely be different. We’ll cross those bridges when we get there.”*

Susan and Sandra defer decisions to their renter because of the length of time they have had them. Susan describes her reason for yielding by saying, *“If they [renters] get testy with us, I guess we can find another farmer, but in the grand scheme of things, I don’t want to jeopardize my long-term relationship with these people [renters].”* Despite conflicting management goals, such as the implementation of cover crops, Susan still yields to her renters for fear of ‘jeopardizing’ their relationship. Sandra, when discussing her renter says, *“He’s a good tenant, and he’s also been with us for probably 20 years...*

maybe just a little more. In order to be fair to him... we'll let him do what he sees fit for next year. ... Probably part out of loyalty to the farmer we have, we thought as long as we have a good situation, we would not entertain any other avenues." Both Susan and Sandra yield to their renter because of their history with them, even though both hope to implement changes after the renters retire.

As the quotes above detail, a main theme among all the women yielding power is because of a complicated renter relationship and their wanting to keep peace. A second dominant reason for yielding power is due to the women not feeling they have enough knowledge about farming methods to push a particular issue (n = 13). For example, Laura (age 78) who inherited her land and co-owns with her husband, states, *"My farmer just does corn one year and soy beans the next. My husband asked me not too long ago if we would ever let the land lie fallow one year. And I don't know if my farmer would agree to that because that is his income. So I just go along with his plan."* She justifies this decision by saying, *"I guess I am not ag-oriented enough, so I don't know what to ask for."*

Cassandra is a 63-year old, sole landowner who rents her land to her brother. She discusses her struggles with knowledge and how to communicate with her brother how she wants the land to be managed, saying, *"I have difficulty with my brother. One of my brothers works the land and I can't talk with him about what my thoughts and goals are for the land. I feel like he can talk circles around me. My long-term goal is that we would have, that the land could be farmed more sustainably. I would like it to be... eventually become... organic. And that's not going to happen with my brother. He, I think, is very*

much still into this better living through chemistry thinking, so I really want to educate myself so that I can have a conversation with him about what his long-term goals and what my long-term goals are, and we could find some common ground and move in that direction. And you can't bring it up with him about cover crops, so it's difficult. And I don't know enough to have a good conversation." While the complicated renter relationship also plays a role in Cassandra's situation, it's her perceived lack of knowledge she is emphasizing as the reason she yields her power.

As detailed in Table 3.2, the average age of the women yielding power is slightly older than the average age of all women in this study, at 70 years old. A majority (n = 21) are sole landowners and slightly more than half (n = 16) reside on the land being farmed^{vi}. Most of these women have acquired their land through inheritance, from either a family member or spouse passing away (n = 23). In addition, most women who yield power use a cash rent lease arrangement with their renter (n = 19).

Happy with Relationship

Sixteen (29%) of the women landowners in the study are happy in their renter relationship, indicated by their feeling included in the decision-making process. Their preferred management practices are at least being discussed and often implemented on their land. For example, Carla is a 56-year old landowner who co-owns with her husband and is living on the land. She says, *"We just sort of shared out the information that I had gotten from [the learning circle] with the tenant that manages our farm. And sort of... talked through that with him... and the possibility of maybe trying to do a cover crop at some point in time."*

Table 3.2: Landowner Characteristics by Category (N = 56).

Landowner characteristics ^a	Yielding (n = 30)	Happy (n = 16)	Not Yielding (n = 10)
Age	Average: 70 years	Average: 67 years	Average: 63 years
Landownership status			
Sole	21	8	3
Co-owner with spouse	4	4	2
Co-owner with family ^b	5	3	4
Residence			
On-land	16	10	7
Off-land	13	6	3
Land acquisition			
Inherited from family	15	8	8
Inherited from spouse	8	1	2
Lease arrangement			
Cash rent	19	8	7
Crop share	8	6	2

^a Any categories that do not add up to the sample population's *n* is information that the interviewee did not provide.

^b This includes those who describe their land as a 'family farm,' co-owned with family members.

Krystal is 60 years old and the sole owner of her land. She lives on her land and says of her renter, "*He's a very good master. He takes care of everything.*" She goes on to say how the conversation went with her renter after she became interested in implementing cover crops on her land, "*I asked him [renter], because I was thinking about putting in the cover crops and he just told me, he says, 'I think that would be great, and that would be the best thing for it.'*"

Connie (age 60) inherited her land and co-owns with some family members. She and her renters are constantly working together to implement practices and are already implementing many of the practices she wants to see on her land. For example, she says,

“We’ve always been pretty conscious about erosion and that kind of thing. And [renter’s names] are as well, so we’ve always kind of talked about that to try to do what we can to keep that [erosion prevention] happening.”

For other women who fall into this category, they may be slightly less involved in the decision-making of the land, but they know what is being implemented on their land and they are happy with the decisions being made by their renter. For example, Michelle (age 76) co-owns the land with her husband. They use a crop-share lease arrangement with their two sons who work the land for them. She commends the work of her sons, saying, *“They’re good guys and they really are doing a good job. I mean, we get very good crops. ... They come in every day, so I know what they’re doing... so I do trust them. ... They come in and then they show with their [iPad] program they have for harvesting, they show me everything they’ve harvested for the day. And so I’m involved, I’m involved with them pretty close.”* Her close involvement in the decisions and knowledge of operations on the farm reveals how she maintains mutual power in this relationship.

All the women identify good communication as the primary reason why they are happy with their renter relationship. These women engage in regular communication with their renter to ensure they are involved in the decision-making process and know what is going on with their land.

For example, Carla and her husband are able to talk to their renter about future changes they desire, and she adds, *“He usually communicates several times with me or with us, so he’s very easy to talk to. And shares information that he has as far as the*

applications of what he's putting on the farm." Loraine, a 66-year old, sole landowner who lives off the land, describes being happy with the relationship with her renters by highlighting the importance of communication, *"I've talked a lot about [new practices] to the guys that farm for me. ... Because I do try to pay attention to what information I get. In my relationship with the Soil and Water Conservation and Farm Service Agency, they encourage you to have cover crops, so I did discuss that with the guys. We talk about insurance risk, things like that. ... If I have a question I text either one or call them. And you know, whatever the question is, it's always answered, or if I need something they take care of it."* Here she also touches on the importance of 'paying attention' to the knowledge she is getting. This relates to a second primary reason for being content in the relationship – a knowledge of farming practices.

Ten women indicated this as a reason they are happy in their renter relationship. Anne (age 52) co-owns the land with her sister. They inherited their farmland after the passing of their father and both live off of the land being farmed. She describes how she and her sister have worked to create a long-term relationship with their cash lease renters. *"I have a really good relationship with all my tenants. And, you know, I think because I've done what they're doing, because I've farmed it, I know the costs and the stresses and that kind of thing. So I think that I'm pretty built up into when they have a question or negotiation, or... a concession on... when we've had a couple of bad years in a row or something. I'll work with them because, you know, long term I'm with them to farm the land like my own. I want them to put resources back into the land... so we have a really good relationship."* Anne's experience in farming the land herself shows how the

knowledge she has provides her with power in decision-making.

The average age of these women is 67 years old (Table 3.2). Of these 16 women who share power in their relationship with their renter, eight are the sole owner and seven are a co-owner. Ten of the women live on the land being farmed, with the remaining six living off the land. Additionally, seven women, mostly sole landowners, inherited their land from family members. Only one woman inherited land after her husband passed. Eight of these women are using a cash-rent lease arrangement with their renter and six are using a crop share agreement.

The final group of women in this study, to which we now turn, are those who do not share power, but rather, are clear about having the power in the relationship.

Not Yielding

Ten women landowners (18%) do not yield their power to their renter. The primary way women in this category take power is by firing their renter. Unlike the women who are yielding power, these women are acting to ensure implementation of certain land management practices and are not yielding to their renter's preferences.

Nanette is a 65-year old, co-owner of family-owned land. She describes the challenges she has had with her former renter by saying, *“I was having problems with him communicating with me. I couldn't get him, I just couldn't get him to communicate with me and I was very troubled by that. ... I actually fired my farmer, and it was a bit traumatic to me. And I switched my business model. I made a lot of changes.”* For Claudia, her renter was failing to implement desired practices and not stewarding the land according to her values. She is a 49-year old, sole landowner who lives on the land.

When she describes her former renter, she says he was an older farmer who did not listen and found questions intrusive and irritating. She describes her decision to replace him with a younger renter, saying, *“And how many of us women walk out of [the learning circle] saying, I’m gonna fire my farmer. And I did. I did.”* She describes how she and other women the learning circle shared their frustrations with their renters, *“Our farmers didn’t listen to... and it was the older male farmers usually, that didn’t listen to us. They just wanted to send us a check and found our questions intrusive and irritating.”* And then of her renter specifically, *“He would tell you whatever you wanted to hear, but he wouldn’t do it... and that was irritating. I wanted cover crops, it didn’t happen. He told me he put ‘em on. I took less money to use it for cover crops, and he didn’t do it. And next year, when I realized he wasn’t gonna put cover crops on, I paid to have them flown in on my own.”*

Judy is a 67-year old owner of land that has been in the family for seven generations and is in the process of firing her renter. She describes how she is not yielding power by saying, *“I’ve talked to him [renter], asked him if he would be interested [in implementing “newer methods of farming... cover crops... non-GMO... just a more responsible approach to farming”] ... offered to go halves with him on some of the costs and he is just absolutely resistant to all of it. So, our relationship is gonna come to an end as soon as I find a different solution that’s gonna better fit my needs.”*

The primary reason for not yielding power identified by all these women involves a very strong preference for how their land is managed. Nanette explains the reasons she decided to fire her renter, *“There were a number of things that kind of came together last*

year for me... and made me decide. ... I wasn't happy with the whole, putting chemicals on the field. I wasn't happy about that. ... I made a complete switch to transitioning to organic." And later in the interview, "When I go to the farm I would love to give it a big hug, I just love it. I love it. I feel like it's my baby, you know." Nanette stresses the importance of ensuring her land is managed according to her values, which is why she refuses to yield power to her renter. Judy explains why she refuses to yield, "This is family land. It's been in my family for seven generations last year... and I'm gonna get it back to a more responsible approach to farming, that's my goal. It's just a general shift in my thinking and a determination to take my land in a direction that I'm gonna go, because after all it is my land."

The second most common reason for women not yielding their power to their renter is because they have had experience working in a male-dominated field. These women are not intimidated by men. For example, Claudia, who fired her renter, states, "*I work with all men. I'm the only woman in my area, and the previous job I was at, there were only six women out of fifteen hundred people, and I was one of the six.*" She is also a board member of the local Farm Bureau, which she hoped might help with men taking her seriously ("*no one takes us seriously*" is what she claims to be the biggest barrier for women landowners).

Margaret is a 74-year old landowner who co-owns land with her family, who also fired her renter. She has experience navigating a male-dominated field through her schooling, saying, "*I signed up for a complete course in electronics, and the teacher called me in when class started, and I thought, 'well what does he want?' ... And he flat*

out told said, 'You're a woman, I don't want a woman in my class.' ... And a college teacher of all things. But anyhow... I did better than his boys did." She goes on to share her experience working with male doctors and confronting them when they contemplated denying a woman a raise because *"she's got a husband."* She laughs saying, *"I'm sure if you ask the right people, they'd consider me a total bitch... but unfortunately a woman has to be that way in order to make a way."* Thus, experiences working in a male-dominated field may have helped these women as agricultural landowners.

In terms of the demographics, the average age of those not yielding is 63 years old, younger than the other two groups of women (Table 3.2). Findings reveal that of the 10 women, three are the sole owner, six have a co-owner, and the remaining is an heir. Seven of the women live on the land, whereas the remaining three reside off the land being farmed. Eight of the women either inherited the land from family members or

Discussion

This study looks at the power relationship between female nonoperating landowners and their male renter to understand more about the power dynamics in the relationship. WNOLs are found to yield their power to the male renter for two main reasons: (1) complicated dynamics of their renter relationship and (2) a lack of knowledge about farming practices that prevents them from making decisions. As suggested by Granovetter's (2001) embeddedness, social relations are clearly a factor that plays into the complicated dynamics of their renter relationship. In most cases, their renter is a neighbor, family member, family friend, or a long-term renter who was

‘inherited’ when the women received the land. Although these relationships may in some ways elicit trust, it may also create uncomfortable situations where the women do not want to undermine their renter’s knowledge and experience.

This group of women who yield power is also identified in previous studies of a dominant-renter, subordinate-landlord relationship (Constance et al. 1996; Gilbert and Beckley, 1993) and the findings of other researchers who have suggested that female landowners have less power in these renter relationships (e.g. Carolan 2005; Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011; WFAN 2013). These women are similar to those who Carter (2017) identifies as ‘placeholders,’ as they defer their decisions (or power) to their male renter. In addition, these findings reveal that a majority of women who yield power to their renter have inherited the land. This supports Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt’s (2011) finding that women who have inherited the land face more barriers in being involved in decision-making on the land. In some cases, this means these women have also inherited their renter (WFAN 2013), as is specified by some of the women in this study.

This study also identifies a group of women who are not yet addressed in the literature and who may be key players in determining ways to balance these landowner-renter power dynamics. These women mutually share decision-making responsibilities with their renter, which makes for a positive relationship. The findings reveal how critical it is for women landowners to have regular, productive communication with their renter, considering *all* the women in this group acknowledge this a reason why they are happy. The social relationship these women share with their renter works in favor with their mutual economic relationship. These findings also suggest the importance of having

knowledge about farming practices, which conveys the value that the learning circle outreach method may have on the lives of these women.

Finally, this study identifies women who are not yielding their decision-making power to their renter. Most of these women have acted by firing and replacing male renters who have failed to implement their desired practices. These women are similar to Carter's (2017) 'changemakers,' who either explicitly or implicitly challenge gendered expectations. Unlike Carter's (2017) study, however, none of the women in this study use less confrontational methods (e.g. conflict avoidance) to impose their power. The women here all used direct action to ensure their desired management practices were being implemented. That is, they do not appear to be attempting to fit into the gendered patriarchal structure of agriculture (Carter 2017). Rather, they are taking on the patriarchal structure.

The findings of this study provide mixed support for Granovetter's (2001) theory of embeddedness. While the women who are happy in their relationship may provide evidence of the benefits to strong social ties, the women who are yielding power reveal that these strong social ties may hinder the economic exchange that exists between these two parties. The women who are happy in their relationship clearly have generated trust with their renter. Productive and frequent communication suggests that these women are better able to engage with the decision-making and production processes on their land. For the women who are yielding power, however, strong social ties with their renter through a long-term relationship, inheritance, or family connection, may become a constraint. Instead of having a relationship based on trust, these women describe

complicated renter dynamics as hindering their ability to engage with the decision-making on their land. Granovetter (2001) suggests that landowners and renters in these relationships have a motivation to keep the trust in order to have a successful economic relationship, however, it is clear that this may not always be true.

This study provides additional insight into the power dynamics examined by land tenure by incorporating the embeddedness of social relations. For each of the categories of women, a variety of reasons are given to explain these dynamics, further adding to the nuances that exist within these relationships. Just as any other group of landowners, women landowners should not be treated as homogenous, but rather as a complex, heterogenous group with a range of power dynamics at play in their landlord-renter relationships.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing research on women landowners in several ways. Existing studies explore the marginalization of women in agriculture, but often the focus is specifically on women who yield power, or have none (e.g. Carolan 2005; Carter 2015; Hall and Mogyorody 2007; Jackson-Smith and Petrzela 2014). This study brings into the discussion two additional groups of women landowners: those who are happy in their renter relationship and those who refuse to yield power.

Future studies should examine what the renters look like (in terms of demographics) and whether that differs between those who are willing to do what the landowner wants, versus those who are not. In addition, future studies should look deeper

into the experiences of women who maintain these balanced power relationships, to determine how they have been successful in navigating these complex situations. What advice might these women have for other female nonoperating landowners? What strategies have worked for them? Have they had any struggles in their relationship and how were those navigated? These kinds of questions may help provide valuable tips for WNOLs nationwide.

This study acknowledges a few limitations. Currently, Iowa is the setting of many existing studies on women landowners (e.g. Carolan 2005; Carter 2017; Duffy and Johanns 2014; Eells 2008). Although this study expands the geographic scope to other states, Indiana and Illinois, it still focuses on the Midwest. How these power relationships play out in other geographical regions is yet to be explored, but is essential for understanding these relationships more fully. In addition, given the nature in which these women were identified as participants for this study, as women engaged in conservation learning circles, there is a likelihood that these women may hold higher regard to conservation-related values for land management. However, their land management preferences were not asked, nor were they the focus of this study. In addition, this method of collecting participants also presents issues of sample bias. Since all participants are involved with learning circles, this excludes the voices of a potentially vital group of women who are not involved in these programs. Whether these women share a similar story to those involved in learning circles, is unclear and requires additional research. Obtaining contact information on WNOLs, however, remains a barrier since there are currently widespread resources available. Lastly, this study is limited in terms of

demographic analysis for the women's race and class, a limitation that should be addressed in future studies.

WNOLs experience a range of power dynamics with their renter and the nuances that exist only further complicate the story. Although this study finds that social relations are clearly embedded in the economic relationship shared between these two parties, they are unable to fully explain the power dynamics that exist. This study also suggests the challenges that prevent many women from using their power as a landowner, but reveals that many women are actively engaged in decision-making and either mutually share power with their renter or hold the power. This study further contributes to existing literature on WNOLs by delving deeper into the nuances of these landowner-renter power relationships and reveals how knowledge may be useful in engaging more women in making decisions about their land and in communicating with their renter.

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- i. 'Principal' meaning the primary owner of the land.
 - ii. The term 'renter' throughout this study is used to denote farm operators, however, previous studies have used the term 'tenant.' These terms may be used interchangeably throughout depending on how the cited author (or respondent) refers to these individuals.
 - iii. TOTAL survey results also find that out of the 534,728 female nonoperating principal landlords in the U.S., 118,155 are between the age of 55-64 (22%) and 62,813 are less than 55 years of age (12%). Actual numbers of women in age ranges greater than 65, include: 168,279 women between 65-74; 115,921 between 75-84; and 69,561 greater than 85 years.
 - iv. AFT is "an agency whose mission is to "save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land" (American Farmland Trust 2018).
 - v. WFAN "is a community of women in sustainable agriculture" with a mission to "engage women in building an ecological and just food and agricultural system through individual and community power" (Women Food and Agriculture Network 2018).
 - vi. One woman did not respond to this question.

CHAPTER 4
BENEFITS OF OUTREACH METHODS USED TO ASSIST WOMEN
AGRICULTURAL LANDOWNERS

1.0 Introduction

Researchers have begun to focus their attention on a group of women who play an important role in the future of landownership in the U.S., women nonoperating⁷ landowners (WNOLs). According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA 2014) Census of Agriculture's Tenure, Ownership, and Transition of Agricultural Land (TOTAL) survey, over half a million⁸ women encompass all nonoperating landowners (37%), who own approximately 25% of farm land that is rented out to a farm operator. Even though this comprises a good portion of agricultural land in the U.S., more recent studies suggest numbers of these women may actually be higher (Petrzelka et al. 2018), meaning women may constitute an even larger group of landowners than the data shows.

For many of these women, landownership does not come without challenges. According to several studies, WNOLs face significant barriers to landownership, including inequitable power relationships between them and their renter (Carolan 2005; Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), invisibility (Eells 2010; Eells and Soulis 2013; Petrzelka et al. 2018; Wells and Eells 2011), and gendered expectations (Carter 2017).

⁷ 'Nonoperating' refers to those who are not operating the farmland themselves, but renting it to a farm operator.

⁸ According to the Census, the total is 534,728 female nonoperating landowners nationwide, compared to 897,336 male nonoperating landowners.

Research on these women is still sparse and most of it comes from one state – Iowa. In this study, my purpose is to expand the research on WNOLs by: (1) determining barriers WNOLs face as identified by WNOLs themselves and those who have worked with WNOLs, and (2) determining how one form of outreach may assist with minimizing these barriers in terms of the human, social, and cultural capital these women gain.

Understanding the perspective of both groups allow for an increased understanding of the barriers WNOLs experience, along with the ways in which these concerns can be addressed. I begin with a review of the literature on WNOLs, then describe the methods used for this study.

2.0 Literature Review

In this review, I first present data on WNOLs, then discuss literature that specifically addresses WNOLs and the barriers they encounter. I then introduce the women’s conservation learning circle model, an outreach method that has been used to assist WNOLs in overcoming barriers they face as agricultural landowners. Finally, human, social, and cultural capital are discussed, and proposed as potentially being gained (or improved) through this outreach method.

According to the TOTAL survey, over half a million WNOLs encompass those landowners who rent out their land (USDA Census of Agriculture 2014). In terms of demographics, survey findings reveal that WNOLs are more likely to over 65 years of age, with more than 76% of them falling into this age range (Bigelow et al. 2016).

According to an Iowa survey, 66% of women landowners (they do not specify those who are non-operating) are married, compared to 27% who are widowed (Duffy and Johanns

2014). For my study, I distinguish between co-owner or sole owner of the land. Iowa's data also reveals that only 27% of land owned by women is inherited, compared with 69% that was purchased (Duffy and Johanns 2014). While this survey does not provide data on women's residence on or off the farmland they own, it finds that 53% of agricultural landowners in Iowa live on their farmland (Duffy and Johanns 2014).

An emerging body of literature is devoted to understanding the situation of WNOLs. Those that do tend to be based in Iowa, focusing on conservation practice implementation, who is making the decisions for sustainable land management, and women's perceived barriers to landownership, including inequitable power relationships between them and their renter (Carolan, 2005; Petrzeka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011), invisibility (Eells 2010; Eells and Soulis 2013; Petrzeka et al. 2018; Wells and Eells 2011), and societal gendered expectations (Carter 2017).

For example, Carolan (2005) studies the barriers to adopting sustainable agricultural practices on rented farmland in Iowa. In his interviews with 10 female landowners, he finds that women express a sense of powerlessness and dependency on their male counterpart (either renter or co-owner) (Carolan 2005). An Iowa county-wide survey conducted by Wells and Eells (2011) finds that women are much more likely to rely upon a farm renter or manager to notice or act to solve problems on their land. Petrzeka and Marquart-Pyatt (2011) support these findings with their survey of absentee landlords in Michigan, Wisconsin, and New York that suggests female landlords may be less involved in decision-making than male landlords, due to power dynamics. The authors conclude, "Female landlords appear to have the least power due to their

relationship with their tenant, their relationship with their siblings, or a combination of these situations” (Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011, 558).

Women landowners also experience invisibility in agriculture. In Eells (2010) and Eells and Soulis’ (2013) studies of women landowners in Iowa, they identify the lack of female representation in their examination of agricultural outreach documents and demographic information on these women on agricultural organization websites. In addition to their invisibility visually, women are excluded from important outreach information. Since many of these women struggle with a lack of technical knowledge, outreach materials that include this male jargon, exclude women (Eells 2010). In addition, these women are being excluded and uninvited from participation in agricultural institutions (Wells and Eells 2011). All of this contributes to what Eells (2010) suggests as, “perpetuat[ing] a system of agricultural conservation wherein women remain outside their role as rightful decision makers for their land whether by hegemony or omission,” (183). These findings reveal the need for women to be included in the agricultural conversation through improved visual representation, accessible materials, and invitation to ‘have a seat at the table.’

Petrzelka et al (2018) add to these studies by addressing the invisibility of WNOLs in terms of the lack of data and federal policy. Through the use of survey and focus group data, they find that despite women nonoperating landowners feeling invisible, they are still trying and eager to obtain information (Petrzelka et al. 2018). Therefore, they conclude, WNOLs desire inclusion and policy efforts need to be addressed to “get WNOLs on the radar” (Petrzelka et al. 2018, 10).

Gendered expectations are also found to challenge women's experience as landowners. In Carter's (2017) study of women farmland owners, gendered expectations in landownership are described as "how land should be used and by whom [as] communicated through cultural narratives and maintained through social interactions," (Carter 2017, 499). These gendered expectations perpetuate men as the ultimate decision maker on land management. Findings reveal that among the 26 WNOLs she interviews, Carter (2017) finds that all the women exhibit characteristics that comply with gendered norms, but that 19 of the women identify acting at some point to resist these gendered norms. Despite intentions to resist, Carter (2017) concludes that the gendered expectations remain largely unchanged, and suggests the importance of "alternative networks of information and support" (Carter 2017, 521) that may assist women in agriculture in breaking down these gendered expectations.

One alternative network that has emerged and that was first initiated by the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN),⁹ are women conservation learning circles. These learning circles are "flexible, peer-directed, facilitated learning experiences, built upon the idea that every member has something to contribute and that every member has something to learn" (WFAN 2013, 4). These meetings begin with women introducing themselves and sharing any issues they may have regarding their land, followed by a technical discussion (often soil health related), and conclude with a field tour where the women travel to a local farm to see practices being implemented

⁹ WFAN "is a community of women in sustainable agriculture" with a mission to "engage women in building an ecological and just food and agricultural system through individual and community power" (WFAN, 2018).

(Petrzelka et al. 2019). These programs are designed for women only and are offered in an informal setting that may be useful in helping the women “find their voice and take action” as landowners (WFAN 2013, 4), along with feeling more comfortable asking questions and discussing the topics with one another (Eells 2008). These women are given opportunities to share challenges they may be facing as a landowner, especially as it relates to gender, to provide an atmosphere where they feel comfortable sharing their experiences. In addition, material is presented in a way that is less intimidating by avoiding technical language, avoiding jargon, and that simply gets to the basics of farming (Petrzelka et al. 2019). Much of this occurs during demonstrations and a field tour, which provide women with hands-on opportunities to engage in activities, such as soil health demonstrations, to better their understanding of various concepts.

Even though the overarching patriarchal nature of our society remains the root cause of the barriers experienced by women in male dominated fields, it is possible these meetings may provide WNOLs with enhanced human, social, and cultural capital. Gains in these forms of capital may offset some of the challenges facing WNOLs. Human capital, in terms of education and training, is stressed by Becker (1994) as critical investments to improve economic growth. While much of his study focuses on the business or organizational scale, human capital may also benefit women in male-dominated fields. Increases in human capital may improve the economic situation for women, and in the case of this study, for women who are renting their land to a farmer. As previous studies have suggested, many WNOLs feel they lack the knowledge of agricultural processes, which may contribute to them leaving decision-making up to their

renter (Eells 2010; Wells and Eells 2011). Especially for women whose renters refuse to update their farming practices to more sustainable methods, forfeiting this power in decision-making may be costing these women.

Social capital and cultural capital enhancement may also improve the situation of WNOLs. Social capital, in terms of one's membership to a group, is already lacking for women in agriculture as evidenced by research showing that they are being left out of the conversation and excluded from this male-dominated group (Wells and Eells 2011). Women's learning circles may provide women an opportunity to improve the size of their network. For WNOLs, increases in social capital may then lessen any feeling of exclusion from agriculture.

Cultural capital is also described by Bourdieu (2001) and refers to the accumulation of skills that can reflect one's social standing in society. This capital may vary depending on the society and the time period, one's material objects, and titles that are given to individuals in society to determine their status (Bourdieu 2001). For example, for women in a patriarchal society, the male-female hierarchy means that women's cultural capital is less valued than a man's is. Since this reflects the larger, structural problem that exists in our society, whether WNOLs would reap any gains in cultural capital through learning circles, is unclear and, frankly, unlikely. Cultural capital for women in agriculture would be best achieved through institutional change that upends the patriarchal structure.

Gains in any of these forms of capital are possible through learning circles. Already studies show that these meetings may be helping women to be more involved in

their land and may be helping in breaking down barriers. For example, one study surveyed women attendees of a learning circle to find that over half of attendees have acted in some way to improve conservation on their farmland (Carter et al. 2016; Fairchild et al. 2018). Gains in education (a form of human capital) may be a reason they feel more comfortable acting. Petrzalka et al (2019) explores the benefits of these programs through interviews with female attendees, finding that women's actions after the meeting point towards empowerment through either increased knowledge, feeling of community with other women, or a recognition of their rights as a landowner. Here gains in human, social, and even cultural capital (through this recognition of their marginalization) are identified.

In this study, I delve deeper into the experiences of WNOLs attendees of learning circles and the female professional staff who are involved in the learning circles. As agricultural staff, they interact directly with these women at the learning circles and listen to their concerns. Gathering information from these women staff helps add to the knowledge about WNOLs by gaining an additional perspective. While we have some information from WNOLs on barriers they face as landowners, we, as of now, do not know what agricultural staff understand the barriers to be. In addition, although some studies identify benefits to learning circles, this study expands our understanding of the capital gains that may be possible. WNOLs are asked about what they find most useful, along with the women staff. Thus, my research question asks: *How do WNOLs and women agricultural staff perceive the barriers facing WNOLs and in what ways are the learning circle methods useful for addressing these barriers?* The methods used for this

study are described in the following section.

3.0 Methods

The first group of respondents in this study are women nonoperating landowners who participated in learning circles conducted by American Farmland Trust (AFT).¹⁰ A comprehensive list of women who attended Illinois and Indiana learning circles from 2014 to 2017 was used as the study population. The list of attendees included their addresses, email, and telephone contact information.

An initial email was sent to each woman attendee from their learning circle facilitator, where the women were informed of the purpose of the study and provided notice that they would be contacted via email or telephone in the upcoming weeks to schedule an interview about their experience as an attendee. This email gave women the opportunity to reply directly to their AFT contact to schedule an interview. For those women who did not respond to the initial email two more attempts at reaching them via email were made. If any emails were returned as undeliverable, and the attendee had not provided telephone information, the contact was noted as undeliverable and eliminated from the study population list. If there were three failed attempts via email, but a telephone number was provided, three attempts to contact were then made via telephone. Any contact's number that was no longer in service was eliminated from the list. In instances when the participant was reached, some women were willing to be interviewed immediately, whereas in other situations an interview would be scheduled at a convenient

¹⁰ AFT is an agency whose mission is to “save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land” (AFT 2018).

time. Prior to the interview, respondents were informed of this study's purpose and were asked for their consent to be voice recorded. If they preferred not to be recorded, detailed notes were taken. If they provided consent, then the interview was recorded and transcribed.

All interviews were conducted between August 2016 and October 2017. The three waves of emails took place between August 2016 and January 2017. The three waves of telephone calls were conducted from November 2016 through April 2017. During the second half of 2017, AFT provided additional contacts who attended meetings in 2016 or early 2017. These women were contacted using the same methods described above, between July and October of 2017. After removing the women on the study population list without accurate contact information and who were not landowners, an N of 218 women remained. Of these, 130 were interviewed, for a response rate of 60%. For this study, I focus solely on the women who identify as nonoperating and rent their land to a farm operator. Seventy-three of the women (56% of the total N) interviewed rent their land.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women landowners, using an IRB approved interview guide that asked the same questions for all respondents, and involved open-ended questions that allowed for more detailed responses and insight.

The second group of respondents in this study consist of women professional staff in agriculture employed at either Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Extension, or other agricultural agencies. SWCD works to promote healthy soil and water practices (Soil and Water

Conservation Society [SWCS] 2018). NRCS is a USDA agency that works with agricultural professionals to improve agricultural land (NRCS n.d.). Extension, also known as the Cooperative Extension System (CES), is a system of local offices throughout the U.S. that provides, “non-formal education and learning activities to people throughout the country- to farmers and other residents of rural communities as well as to people living in urban areas. It emphasizes taking knowledge gained through research and education and bringing it directly to the people to create positive changes” (National Institute of Food and Agriculture n.d.). Women staff at these agencies encompass a variety of roles including: educators, scientists, technicians, analysts, and specialists.

The list of women staff used for the interviews was provided by AFT. The women on the list were involved in conservation learning circles for women landowners conducted by AFT in Indiana and Illinois from 2014 to 2018. Most often their role was as either a facilitator, coordinator, or organizer, but also included those who were involved as agency representatives or presenters.

The same contact methods used for WNOLs was used for the staff, with the initial email to inform the women of the purpose of the study sent in August 2018. The three waves of emails took place between August and October 2018 and the three waves of telephone calls were conducted from September to December 2018. The average length of each interview was about a half hour and involved open-ended questions, to allow for detailed response and insight (Lofland et al. 2006). In order to include more women and account for their work schedules, in November and December 2018 a final fourth email was sent to any woman who had not responded to the three attempts of email or phone

contact, with an emailed version of the interview for the women to fill out and return. This resulted in an additional three written responses to the interview questions. Out of the 49 women in the study sample, 35 were interviewed for a final response rate of 71%. Two of these women were found to have only worked with meetings in Ohio and New York and were removed from analysis, leaving a total of 33 women staff.

All women staff consented to being recorded. Each of these recordings were then transcribed. Using the interview transcripts, three coders coded all interview data. After the first round of open coding, we shifted to a focused coding process which more precisely identifies any findings that are relevant to the study (Emerson et al. 2011). Both inter and intra-coding was used to ensure accuracy of the results and any discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved by all three coders. From this coding process, dominant themes emerged which are used in the findings. In order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents in the following results, pseudonyms are used and none of the women are identified according to their respective agency.

4.0 Findings

These interviews were designed to increase understanding of the perceived barriers that women agricultural landowners face and ways in which women's learning circles have been useful in addressing these barriers through gains in capital, according to women landowners and the female agricultural staff involved with these learning circles.

Table 4.1 shows various characteristics of the WNOLs interviewed in this study. Out of the 73 WNOLs interviewed for this study, 51% of the women are sole owners (n = 36), whereas 42% (n = 30) are co-owners of their land. If we assume that those who are

Table 4.1 Characteristics of women nonoperating landowners

Characteristic (N = 73)	Frequency and means
Landownership status	
Sole owner	36
Co-owner	30
Residence	
On-land	40
Off-land	30
Age	68

married are also co-owner (which may be an incorrect assumption), this differs from the Duffy and Johanns (2014) Iowa survey finding that 66% of women landowners are married. Fifty-seven percent (n = 40) live on the land being farmed. This is consistent with Iowa data showing that slightly over half of agricultural landowners reside on the land being farmed. In addition, these women are an average age of 68 years old, which is consistent with TOTAL survey data showing that women non-operators are likely to be over the age of 65.

Characteristics of the women staff are outlined in Table 4.2. For the 33 women staff, most are employed at either SWCD (n = 12) or NRCS (n = 12). Those that are considered ‘Other,’ primarily consist of women employed at Extension, state agricultural agencies, and land conservancies. Most of the women staff have a bachelor’s degree (n = 19). The average years employed at the agency is 14 years and the average number of years in their current role is 8 years.

I first discuss what WNOLs identify as being the primary barriers they face in their role, followed by barriers the women staff perceive. I then detail the most useful

Table 4.2 Characteristics of women staff

Characteristic (N = 33)	Frequency and means
Agency Affiliation	
SWCD	12
NRCS	12
Other	9
Education ^a	
Some College	1
Associates	3
Bachelors	19
Masters	7
Ph.D.	2
Years employed at the agency	Average 14 years
Years employed in their current role at the agency	Average 8 years

^a One respondent did not answer this question.

aspects of the learning circles as described by the WNOLs followed by the perspective of women staff.

4.1 Barriers

To address my first research question, *‘how do WNOLs and women agricultural staff perceive the barriers facing WNOLs,’* I asked WNOLs what barriers, if any, they face being an agricultural landowner. The top two identified by WNOLs, include; (1) renter¹¹ relationship issues, and (2) a lack of knowledge about being agricultural landowners.

The primary barrier that was acknowledged by 57% (n = 42) of WNOLs in this

¹¹ The term ‘renter’ is used to denote the farm operator renting from the women landowners, and is equivalent to ‘tenant,’ which some of the women use in their interviews.

study are issues they face in their renter relationship. These issues most commonly include problems with communication or barriers that stem from complicated renter dynamics. This latter issue includes situations where the renter is a neighbor, inherited renter, or family member.

Donna a 68-year-old sole landowner describes issues with her renter, saying, *“He [renter] never communicates with me. And when I was talking to some of the ladies [at the learning circle] they said they try to talk to their renter once a month and I was thinking, ‘well I don’t even get to talk to him once a year unless I call him up.’ So I was kind of concerned about that. And it’s not improving. I don’t know if I should tell him that I want to talk to him once a month, or how to handle that because he’s a neighbor. And I don’t want to, you know, upset him.”* Donna highlights how communication creates barriers, but also refers to the complicated renter dynamics that are at play from her renter being her neighbor.

Another example is Suzanne, a 71-year-old co-owner of agricultural land. She tells how, after her father’s passing, she ‘inherited’ the renter who leased from her father. She describes how these complicated renter dynamics contribute to the barriers she faces when she says, *“We are just done wanting to be demanding, we want to keep the same relationship, but when he does retire, perhaps we’ll be a bit more aggressive.....like so many of us, you really don’t want to be demanding, but you do want to be a good manager, a good steward of what we’ve got.”*

In Suzanne’s example, the renter relationship may have been further complicated by her inheriting the same renter that leased from her father. For other women, having a

family member leasing the land may also contribute to these challenging dynamics. One example is Corinna, a 63-year-old sole landowner, whose brother leases her land. She notes, *“My one attempt at saying that I would just like to know other ways to have more sustainable practices and stewarding the land and [he] just looked at me and was like, ‘we have very sustainable practices,’ and I’m like, ‘wait a minute, every year there’s more chemicals, I don’t understand how that’s sustainable.’ And he says, ‘You just don’t understand farming.” And I was like, okay, and that was the end of the conversation.”*

This latter statement by Corinna ties directly to the second most commonly identified barrier for WNOLs, the lack of knowledge they feel they have as agricultural landowners (33%, n = 24). For example, Margaret is 74-years old and co-owns her land. She notes, *“You know, many of the boys, they kind of learn farming at their dad’s knee, and they learned it little by little, almost by osmosis over the years. We women haven’t had that, you know we basically were thrown into it when the parents died or we had to do something. And so we come in with nothing, no knowledge of anything other than, put the crops out in the spring and then harvest it in the fall is probably the extent of knowledge that we have.”*

Anne is 52 years old and co-owns her land with her sisters. She too identifies knowledge as a barrier, adding, *“I think about the women that have grown up off the farm... who have inherited land from a grandfather, or farmer, or someone that hadn’t been involved in the farm operation and I think for them, they don’t know what to do. I had a phone call once from a women who inherited a farm when her husband died, and she had been not involved, and she knew that we owned the farm across the road from*

her farm, and she called me and said, 'I don't know how to negotiate a farm lease with my nephew who is farming the land. I think that he is not paying me enough, what do I do?' They need information to have confidence in what they're doing... it's just knowing where to go and how to get that information."

Women staff identify the same top two barriers they see women landowners facing, but in reverse order. According to their perspectives, the two primary barriers WNOLs face are: (1) lack of knowledge about being agricultural landowners, and (2) the renter relationship.

WNOL's lack of knowledge was identified by 55% (n = 18) of the women staff as a barrier. Ashley has helped facilitate three learning circles, and says from her observations, *"I think the biggest thing is just they [WNOLs] don't know where to begin and don't know what options are out there, so it can be a little overwhelming. Especially if you don't have an agriculture background. You're not even sure who to ask and what to ask. So, it's that first step. I think once you get that first step and they at least know what options are out there and who to talk to about them, that's huge, but most people just don't even know where to begin because their dad handled that, or their husband handled that or someone else handled that. And you know when they get in a situation where all of the sudden they are the ones in charge of the property, it's kind of a deer in the headlights sort of moment."*

Lynnette has been involved with two learning circles. When asked about the barriers she perceives for WNOLs, she highlights lack of knowledge and details how that translates into lack of confidence, saying, *"They [WNOLs] don't think they have enough*

knowledge... they think they have to be an expert to speak up and be involved. And or, they don't know enough knowledge... for their opinion to be heard. Especially if there's a male owner in the picture. I've tried to get women on my board of directors intentionally, or to host a field tour, and generally they say, 'No, no. I don't know enough.' Or, 'No, he [their male co-owner] can do it instead.'"

Candace has attended four learning circles, and also details how perceived lack of knowledge translates into lack of confidence. She states, *"A lot of times we have an older generation that we are working with, and a lot of times it might have been the husband who did a lot of the farming and they're no longer around. And so now, the wife has taken over and sometimes there's just a nervousness about it because they weren't the primary ones. Or maybe they were involved to some degree, but now it's totally their responsibility and there's sometimes a hesitation. They don't know how to approach a producer to ask questions. They're not necessarily comfortable, you know... can I ask for a soil test report to see what's going on? So sometimes, I think, it's just, it's a general knowledge of farming and its practices and whether they're comfortable talking to their producer about it."* Candace's example provides insight into how lack of knowledge may be creating challenges with WNOLs and their renter relationship, the second dominant barrier identified by agricultural staff.

The renter relationship was identified by 45% (n = 15) of the women staff. Communication and complicated renter relationship dynamics were common observations for why these women experience barriers to this relationship. However, eight staff members described the overlap between the lack of knowledge and WNOL's

relationships with their renter. For some women, their lack of knowledge may contribute to failed communication between them and their renter. For example, Lisa has helped organize four learning circles and describes it this way, *“There’s just the, sort of, gap between the owner and the tenant, and so we’ve found that a lot of women that end up owning the land sort of end up also inheriting the tenant farmer. And there’s always this sort of intimidation factor for the women. I mean, that’s one of the main reasons why we have the learning circles is to give the women landowners more knowledge so that they have more confidence in what to even talk to the tenant farmer about. ... I think that’s still a little bit of a factor or a challenge in getting the women to make that step to talk to their farmer and getting more conservation programs on the ground.”* Here she describes how women’s lack of knowledge contributes to them feeling uncomfortable having conversations with their renter.

One staff member, Loraine, has helped facilitate three learning circles. She highlights how complicated renter dynamics in these relationships create barriers for WNOLs, saying, *“It seems to be the barrier is that they don’t want to affect their relationship with their farmer... their father, or their husband, or their brother, or their uncle, have had this same farmer that they’ve always had, who has been part of this land and they don’t want to affect that relationship. And so, it’s like these women, even if they do feel empowered that they can make the decisions on their lands to change things... their fear of hurting their families or losing their farmer who has this history with their family that seems to be the barrier.”* Loraine and other staff at these meetings try to emphasize to these women their rights as a landowner, but note some WNOLs still fear

challenging their current renter's decisions, saying, *"There's only been a handful... that have... a main role in making those [operating] decisions on their land. And I say that [a main role] because a lot more of them do have that, but they don't step up to that role. So a good chunk of these women [say], 'My farmer's not willing to do that.' And so when discussing, 'you own the land, you do have the decision, if you choose to find a farmer or have your farmer do that how you want, it is your land.'* There are women who say, *'Yes, I understand that.'* Despite this awareness, however, Loraine explains that many of the women fear negatively affecting their renter relationship by pushing for change, especially in family or long-term renter situations.

Another staff member, Sharon, has helped facilitate four meetings. She has worked at her agency for over seven years and also highlights complicated renter dynamics, especially for women who have inherited a long-term renter. She states, *"When you're talking about the older generation, that maybe their spouse has passed, or whatever the case may be, they still seem somewhat timid... There's a question on that evaluation [provided to women landowner attendees] that says, 'are you likely to talk to your tenant now about change?' ... And a lot of the women will still say, 'probably not.'* *And your heart kind of sinks a little bit because you hope that you've made a big enough impact that they would be willing to. But I think change is always hard. And they've got this tenant that's been doing it for years and this is how they're doing it. Unfortunately, I think a lot of times here's this elderly female and she's not necessarily going to go up against that male tenant that has been farming for her. So unfortunately, that's still a barrier."*

The barriers identified by WNOLs and staff in the learning circles are very similar to those noted in previous research. Recognition of these barriers is precisely the reason why WFAN and other organizations have implemented learning circles for women landowners across the U.S. In the following section, WNOLs and the agricultural staff involved identify what they consider to be the most useful aspects of these meetings.

4.2 Most useful aspect of the learning circle

The second research question asks how one form of outreach (learning circles) can assist in minimizing these barriers, such as those detailed above. Potential gains in human, social, or cultural capital will be addressed in the discussion, but are not specifically asked in the interview. Instead, to answer this question respondents are asked what they identify as the most useful aspect of the meeting. For WNOLs, the top two responses include: (1) The hands-on learning that occurred through the field trip and soil health visuals, and (2) Meeting other women, and hearing and learning from their experiences as agricultural landowners.

The learning circle approach incorporates the learning circle portion along with technical discussions (often involving a soil health demonstration) and a field trip to agricultural fields. Hands-on learning was identified by 42% of WNOLs (n = 31).

Jessica is a 58-year old co-owner of her land who discusses why she felt the hands-on portion was valuable to her, saying, *“We did go out to the field and run the land soil test and I think that helped because you get a visual. People have different ways of learning and I’m more of a hands-on, you know it’s harder if you just have a book or something and someone’s telling you about it, and...if you actually have a visual to see*

what they're talking about....so it's nice to go out to the field to see what the person was talking about."

This sentiment was shared by Julie (67-years old) who also co-owns her land, *"Well, it [field trip], gave us an insight, in this local area we would notice the farmers would plant crops during the winter times, and it was at times turnips and them type of things, but that [field trip] opened my eyes as to the reason behind planting the cover crops in the winter times. To keep the biological environment going, and I thought that was very interesting... you can read anything but actually see it in physical, right in front of you, I think it makes more of an impact."* Julie inherited land from her family and currently co-owns the land with her husband.

Last, in the words of Fran, a 54-year-old landowner, who is now living back on the land she grew up on, she says of the meetings, *"I really liked the information on the different types of soil. All of those experiment types of things they did were really informative for me ... 'cause I'm a visual person. So for me it was really neat to actually see the different layers of the soil and that gave me a great understanding about no-till, so I was like yay! That's good!"*

The second most commonly identified aspect of the meeting that 41% (n = 30) of WNOLs felt was most useful, was making connections and hearing from other women landowners. This sentiment was shared by Sandra, a 62-year old sole landowner, who notes, *"It was sharing... sharing our farm experiences with other women. Coming away with a feeling that... You know. That you're not alone in this strange new world [of being a landowner]."*

Nanette (65 years old) co-owns her land with her husband and also identified the value of the connections with other landowners, saying, *“It was a little bit tough for us to deal with farmers because they all had to be men, I haven’t dealt with any female farmers, and here we were as landowners, women. Um so that was a touchy issue, and I haven’t really been able to talk much to other people about it...because nobody really understands. And I am so glad we had this...something important all in common, and we were just trying to make sense of it. Trying to figure out how to, how to [have] the best relationship that we could with our farmer, given that the dynamics were a little bit uncomfortable at times.”*

Lisa is 58 years old and reflects on how these meetings allowed for women with more experience in landownership to share their advice, *“I really liked some of the round groups when we sat and talked. When you start talking to other lady land owners who have kind of been down the road or around the block you know, it gives you a good idea of, oh, maybe we should try that. That works for them, I wonder if this will work for us. You’re learning then from somebody that has that experience. Or you could discuss what is going on and someone can give you some pointers you know with any subject that has to deal with farmers...Maybe somebody has a problem with their tenant. How do you get rid of a tenant you’re not happy with? Or how do you have better relations with your tenant? Or how to negotiate a lease? Those types of things are, for me they’re beneficial because mostly the group that we were with were ladies from the same area.... And it’s not that someone from an agency or college or something like that doesn’t have something beneficial to add, but it is very helpful when you’re talking to people that have*

been there, done that, type of thing.”

Thirty percent (n = 10) of women staff spoke of opportunities for WNOLs to meet other women, hear and learn from their experiences as being useful in helping to begin minimizing barriers for WNOLs. The staff highlight the relationships they saw forming and the connections WNOLs were able to make with one another, especially through the bonding that stems from being in similar roles. Gail has attended several learning circles. She describes her observation of the relationships that form, saying, *“As an outsider looking in, I would say there would be value in the networking that happens. Sometimes the ladies that attend know somebody else. Sometimes they come and they don't know anybody else. There's also, you know, multiple generations. So, there might be, who I would call maybe like the matriarch of a family who has been farming for 50 years, who is able to talk to someone who just inherited a farm and is trying to figure out how to talk to her renter, or her tenant. So, the interactions between, the potential for the networking and the information that they can get from each other, I would say would be valuable.”*

Rebecca has helped facilitate three learning circles and has also noticed the connections that form, saying, *“We do a sharing activity in the front and that's... our icebreaker or whatever you want to call it. And there's always tears. There's usually always tears at some point in every circle I've been to. So last year, I had a widow on one side of the road that shared that she had just lost her husband and that they had moved out from [City, State] because he wanted to live on the farm like he had grown up on and then he died. She has the farm now. And all of these responsibilities, she never grew up on a farm, and so she was there because it was his passion. And so she shared her story,*

and she shared the road that she lived on. We get around in the U-shape, we got on the other side of the room and we have another lady tell us that she was a widow and she lived, ended up living, like a mile south of this other widow and they both had farms and they didn't know each other. And it was very interesting that when we broke into our four groups, these two women, even though they were on opposite sides of the room, they got together in their groups, and then at lunch time one moved her chair across the room to eat lunch with this other, the other widow. And so, to see this bonding and support for one another, I find that very, very heartwarming."

The nonintimidating atmosphere of these meetings was the second most commonly identified benefit to the learning circles by 24% of the staff (n = 8). Avoiding technical language and getting to the basics of farming, is what Ashley has found to be most useful. She has attended three learning circles and says, *"I think reaching that group [WNOLs] with this format seems to be a good fit because it's not as intimidating as some of the other types of workshops that we host. ... It's kind of hard to just jump in to some of that more technical stuff when you're not really sure of the basics, it can be intimidating. So this is kind of a nice way to ease people into it all. And you don't have to be a farmer. ... So this is a nice way we can kind of open it up to everybody and say, 'If you're a woman and you're at all interested in land, that's all the criteria you need.'"*

For Tina, she highlights the benefit of not having men at these meetings in order to create a comfortable atmosphere for WNOLs. She has helped host a couple learning circles and she says, *"It sounds bad, but when men are in the room and acting as an authority of, 'oh, I know everything,' the women are a lot less likely to speak up and ask*

those questions that they might feel silly asking. But when it's all women, I feel like they ask a lot more questions and they're just more open to speaking."

Other women staff stress the value of having smaller, more intimate meetings that are women-only. Mandy has helped with planning two learning circles and notes, *"I think we've heard a lot of women say that they...shy away from some of our bigger meetings that we have, that are primarily men. I think there is an intimidation, a factor of just women coming in at different levels of this farming, and having a lot of questions, not being confident in asking them in these groups with men. So it was interesting to see women in that setting comfortable asking. And just us even taking our talks way down to basic levels, that gave them the understanding they need. And it was refreshing to see them get that comfort level."* There is clear value of the learning circle approach and design, as identified by the agricultural staff present, in assisting WNOLs.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

WNOLs identify their male renter relationship as the primary barrier in their landowner role. Staff also identify this as a primary barrier. These findings support those of Carolan (2005) and Petrzelka and Marquart-Pyatt (2011), that women identify inequitable power relations with their male renter. Staff also recognize the struggles WNOLs face in their renter relationship, identifying issues of intimidation, a lack of confidence, and complicated renter dynamics. Future studies may benefit from a focus group perspective that includes both landowners and their renters to understand more about where this gap in communication or unequal power distribution stems. It may also be useful for brainstorming ways to improve this relationship by incorporating both

perspectives.

Staff members are most likely to identify WNOL's lack of knowledge as being the primary barrier they see WNOLs facing, while WNOLs identify this as the second most common barrier. This lack of knowledge may stem from a combination of factors. Staff members describe many of these women may lack an agricultural background, or simply rely on the knowledge of their male co-owner or renter instead of trusting their own knowledge. This is also supported by the observations of WNOLs themselves and supports findings of Eells (2010) and others (e.g. Carolan 2005; Petrzalka et al. 2018). This perceived lack of knowledge is one of the key areas where learning circles may provide human capital gains by helping WNOLs understand more about general agricultural practices, as well as what their rights are as a landowner.

The interviews also provide insight into how learning circles, as an outreach method, may be providing access to human and social capital that may help address the barriers faced by WNOLs. Cultural capital is less likely to be gained from these learning circles, aside from providing women an increased understanding of the patriarchal influences in agriculture that create barriers. WNOLs describe the hands-on learning aspect of the meeting, as well as meeting other women, hearing and learning from their experiences as highly beneficial. This education provides human capital gains, whereas expanding networks provides social capital. Staff highlight WNOLs meeting other WNOLs, hearing and learning from their experiences as the most beneficial, followed by the nonintimidating atmosphere of the meetings. Staff tend to highlight gains in social capital above other forms of capital. Both WNOLs and women staff support the findings

of Petrzelka et al (forthcoming) that both the structure of the circles (whether it be the hands-on portion or the nonintimidating atmosphere) and the connections formed between women by sharing experiences and knowledge are the most useful aspects of these meetings.

Women's gains in capital are evidenced from this study. These learning circles clearly provide women with human capital in terms of education and training in agricultural practices. Barriers of knowledge that prevent women's engagement in decision-making may be reduced through these efforts. Women's social capital is also strengthened and discussed as a benefit of these learning circles. Women are forming connections and creating useful relationships that may provide them with additional exchanges of human and cultural capital in the long-term. Last, while these women may not be able to make some gains in cultural capital based on their status as a woman, they may be provided greater awareness of the barriers they experience in our patriarchal society.

Caution should be taken before assuming these learning circles are the best or only way to eliminate the marginalization of women in agriculture. Even though these programs benefit women in agriculture, new strategies need to be developed at the institutional level to address the patriarchal norms that continue to perpetuate women's marginalization in this field. While gains in capital have their benefits, it is not enough to simply provide women with resources and then leave them alone to deal with the burden of lifting themselves out of their oppression. Rather, it is society's obligation to take a hard look at institutional policies and social norms that perpetuate women's

marginalization and make the necessary changes.

Sheryl Sandberg's (2013) book, *Lean In*, looks at women in business and suggests women need to challenge and push themselves in their career... a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps," kind of approach. However, this fails to address structural and social barriers. Criticisms of this approach stress that it is not enough to achieve gender equality through individual action (Fitzsimons et al. 2018). Structural and social change is crucial. What is more, even if women are empowered by learning circles to become more assertive, this may run the risk of women being penalized for their assertiveness. The *Lean In* argument, and similarly, the assumption that these women landowners need only to be empowered through learning circles to gain equality to men in this male dominated field, is flawed. The patriarchal structure of our society is the root of these barriers imposed upon women, and structural change is needed. Institutions can address these barriers by initiating policy, economic, and social change that promote equitable conditions for women.

Overall, this study adds to the existing research on WNOLs by providing a perspective of these barriers from those who work closely with them, women agricultural staff. In addition, these findings reveal how learning circles, as a form of outreach, can begin to address these barriers. As noted by WNOLs and staff, this is primarily through increasing knowledge and providing networking opportunities for WNOLs. While this study encourages more learning circles to assist WNOLs, it also calls for new and innovative ways to provide women with human, social, and cultural capital gains that may help to address these barriers. For example, free online resources, such as learning

tools, guides on agricultural terminology, and discussion forums for women to engage with one another, may be other avenues where these women can find assistance and community. Finding ways to help WNOLs overcome barriers is critical to improving the lives of women landowners nationwide, but in order to fully address women's marginalization in our society there must be a complete restructuring of the institutions and norms that have placed women (unwillingly, I might add) in these roles initially.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Discussion

The findings of my dissertation provide additional insight into the experiences of women in agriculture. The first study finds that women are severely underrepresented by the USDA. This study supports the findings of Eells (2008, 2010), that males are more likely to be depicted and agricultural agencies tend to gear their material towards males. Results from my study's content analysis reveals that there are twice as many photos that depict only males than those depicting only females. Men are also twice as likely as women to be the focus of the photograph and are four times more likely to be shown as active. In addition, men are twice as likely to be represented in an agricultural agency role and three times as likely than women to be depicted in an agricultural role in these photographs. These numbers are not accidental, and they underscore the need for women to be equally represented in agricultural imagery.

In the words of Wells and Eells (2011), "*Words matter, but images shape perception and may trump words because images help confirm whether we are indeed seeing the same thing*" (138A). Imagery is a powerful tool, and through it is the potential to promote acceptance or to alienate. These numbers reveal that the USDA is alienating women in agriculture through the content of these photographs, proving that *indeed we are seeing the same thing*, and that "thing" is that women are not welcome. According to Eells (2010), "*outreach that is not targeted to women, excludes women*" (183). This message needs to change in order to encourage more diverse participation in agriculture.

Having more voices at the table means that it will not just be the “60-year old white male” who is being heard. This paper is a call for the USDA to step up and fulfill their mission to serve all people in agriculture.

Next, this dissertation adds to the research on the experiences of WNOLs in the U.S. Specifically, my research increases the understanding of power dynamics at play between WNOLs and their renter. Many of the women discussed in these pages reveal they are yielding power to their renter for a variety of reasons, the two most common due to complicated dynamics of their renter relationship, or a perceived lack of knowledge about farm practices. These women are similar to those Carter (2017) identifies as ‘placeholders,’ as they defer their decisions to a male renter. These women are part of the dominant renter-subordinate landowner relationship that has been suggested by several scholars (e.g. Constance, Rikoon, and Ma 1996; Gilbert and Beckley 1993; Harvey 1982; Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011). As suggested by Granovetter’s (2001) theory of embeddedness, social relations are clearly a factor that plays into the complicated dynamics of these landowner-renter relationships.

However, there are also women who are not part of this relationship and are much less discussed in literature. These women are happy in their renter relationship and mutually share power (e.g. decision-making capabilities). Unlike Carolan (2005), who suggests that a ‘cooperative relationship’ may not be the case for women landowners and their renter, these women prove otherwise. Even though several studies find women less involved in decision making (e.g. Carter 2017; Eells 2010; Petzelka and Marquart-Pyatt 2011; Rogers and Vandeman 1993; Salamon and Keim 1979; Wells and Eells 2011;

WFAN 2013), my study suggests that these women who share power may be the anomaly. Perhaps women landowners and male renters *can* and *do* work together and mutually make decisions for their land. And to do so, communication between the two is key, as all of these women indicated. This group of women reveal knowledge of agriculture also contributes to a shared power relationship. This finding emphasizes the importance of programs, such as the learning circles, that target women who desire more agricultural education.

The third group of women identified in my research are similar to those identified by Carter (2017) as ‘changemakers.’ However, in my study all of the women in this group use explicit action to execute their power, primarily, firing their renter. These women support the dominant landowner-subordinate renter relationship suggested by other scholars (Harris 1974; Mooney 1983), and refuse to conform to the patriarchal rural structure. They are knowledgeable and refuse to be taken advantage of, or not taken seriously by their renter. In the words of Judy, “*after all, it is my land.*” Overall, the three groups of women reveal that women nonoperating landowners are in no way homogeneous and extends the literature on WNOLs, that to date has tended to put all WNOLs into one category, that of being marginalized.

The final paper in this dissertation adds to the research on barriers that face WNOLs, by providing voices of both WNOLs and agricultural staff. This study finds that, in large part, the barriers identified by WNOLs and staff are consistent. This study also identifies aspects of the learning circles that are most beneficial for WNOLs in terms of the potential human, social, and cultural capital gains. WNOLs and staff most often

identify human and social capital that stems from education and fostering a sense of community among these women. While these women may gain cultural capital through an improved understanding of patriarchal influences, it is less noticeable than the human and social capital gains. This study reinforces the need for this type of outreach to improve women's access to capital through agricultural knowledge and fostering a sense of community for these women, however, it should not be proposed as a 'fix all' for the structural barriers imposed on women in a patriarchal society.

Implications

There are several implications from this research. First, this is a call for the USDA to be more inclusive with women's representation on all forums. From the findings of the content analysis, it is concluded that they are failing at this objective. There are several ways the USDA could be more inclusive towards women in agriculture. First, and perhaps most obvious, is by improving women's representation on all USDA websites, social media, and outreach materials that portray individuals in agriculture. Women in agriculture need to be visible. This has the potential to not only assist with their acceptance into this field, but also may encourage more women to be involved in agriculture. The USDA should also more systematically conduct national surveys on nonoperating landowners. Having a comprehensive, nation-wide database would allow for more statistical exploration into the nuances that may exist with the various demographics and characteristics of landowners. The USDA could also apply more funding towards programs that promote an inclusive environment towards women in agriculture. While the work of the Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN) and

other likeminded organizations is making a positive impact, more needs to be initiated by the USDA itself.

I also suggest that researchers conduct intense scrutiny on existing policies and programs that may unintentionally (or intentionally) discriminate against women. This could involve research (qualitative and quantitative) that asks women in agriculture whether they have experienced any form of discrimination from USDA policies or programs, in terms of access to programs, obtaining information, or the like. For those policies or programs that are identified, changes must be made to ensure they fulfill the USDA's mission of being inclusive towards all individuals in agriculture.

Finally, these three papers identify that women in agriculture, specifically WNOLs, need opportunities that give them a voice. These women clearly are involved in agriculture, but between issues of representation which can contribute to making women in agriculture feel invisible, to the power dynamics they face with their renter, to other barriers these women may face, it is clear that not enough is being done to eliminate gender discrimination. WFAN and other organization have initiated learning circles, but similar initiatives that target women in agriculture are needed. However, initiatives focusing on 'improving' the woman are not the cure. Institutional change is necessary to break down the patriarchal structure of our society. Women in agriculture have been living in a 'man's world' for far too long, and their time for equality is long overdue.

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