



Creating and consuming the heartland: Symbolic boundaries in representations of femininity and rurality in U.S. Magazines



Julie C. Keller ^{a,*}, Sarah E. Lloyd ^b, Michael M. Bell ^c

^a Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University of Rhode Island, 507 Chafee Building, 10 Chafee Road, Kingston, RI, 02881, USA

^b Wisconsin Farmers Union, 108 S. Webster Street, Suite #201, Madison, WI, 53703, USA

^c Department of Community & Environmental Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 340 C Agricultural Hall, 1450 Linden Drive, Madison, WI, 53706, USA

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ABSTRACT

Scholars of rural studies have investigated a range of places and subcultures to identify varieties of rural masculinity—both new and old—and to understand how they shape social relations (e.g., Bell, 2004; Campbell, 2000; Hennen, 2008). Yet a similarly energetic effort to understand rural femininity and its consequences on social life is lacking. Simultaneously, while cultural studies of boundary-making processes have intensified in recent years, more work is needed to understand how “cultural narratives” shape gendered boundary-making processes (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). In this article we ask: how do representations of rural femininities vary across different media sources? And, how do symbolic boundaries in these representations work to valorize specific rural femininities? Drawing in part on the recent emergence of a hip, countryside consumerism, we analyze gender on the symbolic and cultural level, making use of images and language to understand how representations of rurality and femininity intersect. Analyzing content from two magazines in different genres, *Successful Farmer* and *Country Living*, our findings revealed that rural femininities are contextual and depend on multiple and often shifting understandings of both rurality and femininity. We specifically identified two distinct forms of rural femininity, which we refer to as *productivist rural femininity* and *transformative country chic*. Further, we found that in both magazines symbolic boundary-making relied on the gendered division of labor to construct rural femininities, but that *Country Living* tended to use symbols of social class to portray desirable rural femininity, more so than *Successful Farming*. The article concludes with a discussion of further directions for the study of rural femininities and symbolic boundaries.

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1. Introduction

In the last couple of decades, rural studies has seen a surge in scholarship on rural masculinities. From pub culture (Campbell, 2000; Leyshon, 2005) to radical faeries (Bell, 2000; Hennen, 2008), scholars have examined a variety of subcultures and venues—some quite surprising—to understand how rurality is tangled up with masculinity. As they reveal the importance of place in the construction of gender and vice versa, some scholars argue that rurality is infused with masculine meanings (e.g., Kazyak, 2012), just as mainstream understandings of masculinity seem to be tinged with images of rurality (e.g., Campbell et al., 2006). And yet,

the preoccupation with the relationship between masculinity and rurality may be overly reductive, with the unintentional effect of passing over how the rural helps construct the social imagination of femininity, and how the feminine helps construct our imagination of rurality.

There is a rich history of rural scholarship on women's work in agriculture and unequal gender relations in rural places more generally (Brandth, 2002; O'Hara, 1998; Rosenfeld and Tigges, 1988; Sachs, 1983, 1996; Trauger, 2004; Whatmore, 1991; Zimmerman, 2013). This work has strongly shaped the direction of rural studies, and, as Pini et al. (2014) note, these scholars carved out a space for the work on rural masculinities. But although rural gender scholars have called for more work on both masculinities and femininities (e.g., Little, 2002), the latter have not received comparable attention in rural studies.

Exemplified most recently by the popular blog, *City*

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jckeller@uri.edu (J.C. Keller), sloyd@wisconsinfarmersunion.com (S.E. Lloyd), michaelbell@wisc.edu (M.M. Bell).

Farmhouse—“living a modern country life one project at a time” (citycountrylife.com)—and *Modern Farmer* magazine (Haughney, 2013), the recent emergence of a hip, countryside sensibility, complete with a “feed sack chic” consumerism, offers scholars of rural life an opportunity to identify a new kind of rural femininity. Although this “modern country” lifestyle may have implications for masculinity, in this article we emphasize its effects on femininity, which can be identified in “farmhouse chic” home décor (e.g., rustandhoney.com), tips for women in small-scale entrepreneurship (e.g., thefarmchicks.com), and advice for expecting moms (e.g., naturebaby.com).

We recognize that constellations of rural femininities derive from multiple sources, involve different groups of social actors with various stakes, and are often constructed in relation to social divisions along race, gender, and class lines. As such, we are interested in understanding exactly how rural femininities may be portrayed differently, depending on the source and the producers. Given the vast literature on gender inequality in agriculture, we chose popular agricultural media as one source type for our study, setting this against popular lifestyle media as a second source type.

By bringing attention to the understudied area of rural femininity, we not only highlight the diverse forms that rural femininity can take in popular culture, but we also contribute to the literature within rural studies on symbolic boundary-making. The cultural turn in rural studies scholarship has resulted in an explosion of interest in tracking multiple meanings of rurality as captured by rural residents and non-residents (e.g., Bell, 1994; Cloke, 1997; Cloke and Little, 1997; Gray, 2009), as well as representations of rural life in mass media (e.g. Baylina and Berg, 2010). From a cultural sociology perspective, tracking rural meanings is aided by the study of symbolic boundaries that dictate what or who is authentically “country.” This search for rural authenticity intensifies when we consider just how pervasive the culture of local foods, sustainable agriculture, and the related trend of “rural chic” has become. In light of a surge of recent scholarship that articulates the classed and racialized politics of localism and exclusionary food justice movements (e.g., Alkon, 2012; Guthman, 2008; Johnston and Baumann, 2010), we see a need to identify how gender intersects with differences over what the rural means and how it may be invoked to draw symbolic, and ultimately social, boundaries.

In this article we ask: how do representations of rural femininities vary across different media sources? And, how do symbolic boundaries in these representations work to valorize specific rural femininities? Relying on a cultural sociological approach to gender and rurality, we examined images and text from two magazines in different genres, *Successful Farmer* and *Country Living*. Our findings indicated that rural femininities are contextual and depend on multiple and often shifting understandings of both rurality and femininity. We specifically identified two distinct forms of rural femininity, which we refer to as *productivist rural femininity* and *transformative country chic*. The productivist rural femininity was characterized by little involvement in major farm decisions, crafting solutions to communication problems, and accountability for the health and wellbeing of the family. By contrast, *Country Living* promoted the *transformative country chic* femininity, guiding readers toward finding a country home, career shifts, decorating, leisure and country cooking. Further, we found that in both magazines symbolic boundary-making relied on the gendered division of labor to construct rural femininities, but that *Country Living* tended to use symbols of social class to portray desirable rural femininity, more so than *Successful Farming*. These findings highlight that there are no straight-forward definitions of *rural femininity*, as variants can be derived from different sources and carry differently classed and gendered connotations. Results

also underscore the sociological importance of examining recent trends in the use of rural symbols in popular culture, and understanding what these trends mean for shifting urban–rural social relations.

2. Methodology and data

As media scholars and sociologists have demonstrated (e.g., Gray, 1995; Storey, 2003), popular culture is an important arena for understanding how identities are packaged and disseminated. Because we wanted to understand how ideas about rurality and femininity are packaged for large audiences, we followed in the footsteps of sociologists and media scholars before us, choosing to focus on the realm of popular culture and the “politics of representation” (Grindstaff, 2008, p.210). Our methodology is also in line with sociologists who view gender using a multilevel framework that includes structural, interactional, and symbolic/cultural levels (e.g., Acker, 1990; Messner, 2000; Risman, 1999). In this article we focused primarily on the symbolic/cultural level, as we are interested in diverse representations of rural femininities in popular publications aimed at different audiences and regions. As such, we were interested in understanding *exactly how* rural femininities may be portrayed differently, depending on the source and the producers of content. Given the vast literature on gender inequality in agriculture, we chose popular agricultural media as one source type for our study, setting this against popular lifestyle media as a second source type. We expected that choosing two very different publications—one produced from a conventional agricultural perspective and the other from a lifestyle urban/suburban perspective—would likely yield contrasting types of rural femininities, and thus suggest the diversity of rural femininities observable in print media.

Although we could have chosen to analyze television, film, or online media, we selected the print medium of popular magazines to allow for comparison across previous studies, such as Walter and Wilson's (1996) study of women's representations in agricultural magazines, which included *Successful Farming*. In addition, while it could be argued that magazines are becoming irrelevant as digital content comes to dominate the media landscape, the readership of the popular magazines we chose is quite high, as noted below, and both magazines offer digital subscriptions, as well as maintain active Twitter and Facebook accounts.

To examine femininity in rural spaces, we selected the American magazine *Successful Farming* because it is a popular mainstream agricultural trade publication geared toward farmers and farm families. Founded in 1902, *Successful Farming* is a “major national farm publication” (Agri Marketing, 2002). The stated goal of *Successful Farming* editors is “to help farmers make money, save time, and grow their satisfaction in the challenging business of farming” (Meredith Corporation, 2011, p.2). In 2010 their readership was 840,000, with 69% men and 31% women. The average age of the reader was 57, with a median gross income of \$157,000, and the average farm size was 647 acres (Meredith Corporation, 2011), substantially larger than the national average of 434 acres in 2012 (USDA, 2014a), reflecting the magazine's orientation towards more industrial farmers.

We selected the American magazine, *Country Living*, to examine rural representations in feminine-coded spaces because it is a popular home decorating and lifestyle magazine geared toward women. It was also selected for its availability at many public libraries across the U.S., a feature which was important for us logistically, but also relevant for establishing wide readership. In 2010 they had a total readership of over 11 million, with 78% women and 22% men. The median age of the reader was 53, and the median head of household income was \$59,944. Fifty nine percent

of the readers have attended college and 65% are married.¹ *Country Living* describes an “exclusive readership,” and as evidence, they inform the reader that, on average, 79% of their readers “do not read any other shelter or lifestyle magazine”, such as *Martha Stewart Living* or *Real Simple* (GfK MRI, 2011). Like *Successful Farming*, *Country Living* aims at a disproportionately “up-market” readership, no doubt in part to be more attractive to advertisers.

The material we analyzed included the editorial and advertising content from the year 2011 for all issues of *Successful Farming* (13 issues) and all issues from *Country Living* (11 issues). Because we wanted to track recent trends in representations of femininity and rurality, we selected the most current issues of the magazines available at the time of analysis. A study of magazine content from multiple years may have yielded interesting results about the durability of rural femininities over time, but funding was not available for this level of analysis. For our goal of comparing representations of rurality and femininity across two different publications, we believe that analyzing articles and advertising from a total of 24 issues from one year was adequate.

Each 2011 issue of *Country Living* contained four to five feature articles, in addition to advertising and eight to nine other articles with bylines, at a length of 134–158 pages, including cover content. Every 2011 *Successful Farming* magazine contained four to nine feature articles, plus advertising content and 10–13 additional articles with bylines, with a length of 76–92 pages per issue, including covers. Following Brandth and Haugen (2000), the gendered character of publications can be determined by counting the frequencies of women and men as authors of the content and as featured in photos and illustrations within articles and advertisements. We followed this quantitative method for our analysis, in addition to the qualitative strategy of identifying, describing, and categorizing portrayals of rurality in *Country Living* and portrayals of femininity and women in *Successful Farming*. Following the analytical approach of other magazine studies focusing on agriculture and gender (Brandth and Haugen, 2000; Sireni, 2014; Walter and Wilson, 1996), we analyzed the discourses present in the publications to understand how the text and images presented women's contributions to the farm household, as well as constructions of femininity and rurality. As a magazine geared overwhelmingly toward women readers, we focused on identifying the moments in *Country Living* in which rurality and its associated cultural characteristics were explicitly named, and then we described the context of this content, copying text directly and typing up descriptions of images. We then sorted these references into themes, such as “how to become a country woman.” For our analysis of *Successful Farming*, a magazine that tended to target male readers, we followed similar methods, but focused on identifying moments in which women and femininity were mentioned or depicted in articles and advertising. An example of a theme developed by sorting references was, “women as helpers on farm.”

3. Theory

3.1. Rural femininities and feminine ruralities

Starting in the early 1980s, scholars working in rural studies in Europe, Australia, and the United States began publishing research that documented women's crucial contributions to agricultural production (e.g., Brandth, 1994, 2002; Flora, 1985; Gasson, 1980;

O'Hara, 1998; Rosenfeld and Tigges, 1988; Sachs, 1983, 1996; Whatmore, 1991). Many of these scholars argued that historically, women's work tended to be “overlooked and undervalued” in the literature on agricultural production and farm households (Sachs, 1983, p.xi; Shortall, 1992; c.f., Zimmerman, 2013). Research in this area has been strengthened in recent years by contributions from scholars studying women and farming in the global South (e.g., Angeles and Hill, 2009; Gunewardena, 2010), as well as women working in sustainable agriculture (Pilgeram and Amos, 2015; Trauger, 2004). As noted by Pini et al. (2014), the early path-breakers in this field have strongly shaped the direction of gender work within rural studies generally, opening the door for eventual work on rural masculinities.

The idea that gender is constructed relationally and that we can uncover the workings of gender through focusing on masculinities and femininities has gained much traction in the last 20 years or so, and has been especially fueled by Raewyn Connell's work (e.g., 1987; 1995). This approach to gender has extended to the field of rural studies, notable in the numerous publications on rural masculinities in recent years. A brave special issue of *Rural Sociology* in 2000 was devoted to rural masculinities and scholars applied this concept to a range of rural topics that extend beyond agriculture, from gay men in the countryside (Bell, 2000) to ultra-right-wing white militias (Kimmel and Ferber, 2000). Several compelling books and edited volumes on rural masculinities followed (e.g., Bell, 2004; Campbell et al., 2006; Little and Morris, 2005), and additional scholarly articles on rural masculinities continue to emerge, albeit slowly, in rural studies journals (e.g., Annes and Redlin, 2012; Saugeres, 2002).

Situated in the social constructionist approach to rurality, much of the work on rural masculinities interrogates the meanings of both masculinity and rurality to show how these are often mutually constituted, wherein the ideas and symbols of masculinity seep into definitions of rurality and vice versa. For example, Campbell et al. (2006) point out that the Marlboro Man is not just a symbol of masculinity, but simultaneously a symbol of the rural. And Kazyak's (2012) study of rural lesbians and gay men in Michigan and Illinois concludes that it is the masculinity that underpins the category of rural that makes the acceptance of visibly masculine lesbians more tenable in rural communities than the acceptance of visibly feminine gay men. Yet if we abide by Connell's (1995) assertion that masculinity is constituted in relation to femininity, it is clear that femininity, too, deserves attention in work on the social construction of rural places. That is, the willingness to suggest that “the rural,” in all its diversity and mixtures of meanings, is somehow always, already masculine ought to sound just as troubling as the assertion that “the urban” is deeply feminine. If we commit to the theory that gender is constructed relationally, then a scholarly rendering of the rural as unequivocally masculine is not a comprehensive analysis of either gender, place, or culture. This article centers on locating femininities in rural places, and understanding how they are deployed in ways that impart different understandings of what the countryside means.

Compared to masculinity, the concept of femininity has received much less scholarly attention, even beyond rural studies. In taking stock of the literature on hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) encouraged scholars to further investigate the concept of femininity in order to better understand its place in the framework of gender hegemony. What Connell (1987) referred to as *emphasized femininity* was formed in tandem with hegemonic masculinity. Yet, with few exceptions (e.g., Pyke and Johnson, 2003; Schippers, 2007), the study of femininity has not received much attention in the discipline of sociology. In rural studies, a handful of gender scholars, most from Europe and Australia, have called for more attention to the contested and changing elements of

¹ Comparable reader demographics for *Successful Farming* on marital status and education level were not available from the publisher for 2010. In 2014, 90% of *Successful Farming* subscribers were married and 29% had a college degree (Meredith Corporation, 2014).

masculinities and femininities, pointing to the importance of seeing gender relations as dynamic and contested. For example, [Bryant and Pini \(2011\)](#) write about farm women and heterosexuality, noting that farm women practice gender in a variety of ways, resisting gender norms at certain instances, but not others, and that these may change, for instance, over a woman's lifetime. In an early article on rural femininity, [Brandth \(1994\)](#) found that Norwegian women using farm machinery reshaped femininity through their daily practices. And [Little \(2002\)](#) called for a direct focus on embodiment in relation to rural femininities and masculinities, drawing on the work of Judith Butler and invoking a framework of performativity to enhance the understanding of practices and shifting meanings of gender identity in rural places. [Keller \(2014\)](#) identified the alternative rural femininity of the “self-identified farmer” among Wisconsin women as they attempted to be recognized as legitimate in their occupation. Finally, [Morris and Evans \(2001\)](#) analyzed representations of women and men in a popular UK agricultural magazine to understand constructions of femininities and masculinities over time. They found that the magazine had shifted toward portraying multiple kinds of femininities, but that the dualistic model of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity tended to prevail ([Morris and Evans, 2001](#)).

This article contributes toward these efforts to draw out the multiple and shifting meanings of femininity in the countryside, and enhances this work by examining simultaneously different kinds of rural femininities from very different sources, a project that has been largely missing in rural scholarship. In line with [Brandth and Haugen's \(2000\)](#) focus on the taken-for-granted masculinity in Norway's forestry industry through an analysis of industry publications, as well as [Brandth's \(1995\)](#) work on tractor advertisements, we propose to uncover the often hidden feminizing of rurality and the ruralizing of femininity in popular lifestyle and agricultural trade magazines. As we locate these feminization and ruralization moments, we add to our understanding of how rurality and femininity are deployed symbolically in both rural and non-rural contexts.

3.2. Symbolic boundaries and cultural sociology

The sociology of culture section of the American Sociological Association has more members than almost any other section, and the publication of a new journal, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, signals an acceleration of interest into how culture matters to sociology. It is thus evident that sociologists have a steadily growing investment in understanding the relationship between culture and society. Chief among their concerns is a preoccupation with symbolic boundaries. This focus is an extension of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his groundbreaking book on cultural capital and consumption, *Distinction* ([Bourdieu 1984](#)). The questions that preoccupy theorists in this area include: How and along which lines are symbolic boundaries sketched? How are they maintained and who does the work to shore up their demarcations? These questions and more have been posed by [Lamont and Molnar \(2002\)](#), and other sociologists who have penned a research agenda for this fast-growing concentration. This scholarship makes a distinction between *symbolic* boundaries and *social* boundaries. Social boundaries are those in place due to uneven access to resources. Symbolic boundaries, on the other hand, are “conceptual distinctions made by social actors” ([Lamont and Molnar, 2002](#), p.168). Symbolic boundary-making works to “separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership” ([Epstein, 1992; Lamont and Molnar, 2002](#), p.168). In a seminal contribution to cultural sociology, [Lamont \(1992\)](#) focuses on the boundaries around social class that are erected and maintained among the French and American upper middle class. In arguing that the high

arts play less of a role in the U.S. than in France in shaping the tastes of cultural elites, Lamont challenges the global applicability of Bourdieu's theory of tastes in *Distinction* ([Bourdieu 1984](#)). In this article we extend this vein of cultural research, using the questions posed by [Lamont and Molnar \(2002\)](#) as a guide to understand how symbolic boundaries determine the intersecting meanings and values of rural life and femininity in the U.S.

[Cloke \(1997\)](#) described the “cultural turn” within the social sciences as a point of origin for the resurgence of interest in rurality. Reviewing recent scholarship in rural studies, such as the boundary-making of “new middle class” in the English countryside ([Heley, 2010](#)) or the culture of animal welfare ([Burton et al., 2012](#)), examples abound of research that engages a cultural lens to examine rural spaces. There are, of course, multiple and contested rurals to examine (e.g., [Cloke and Little, 1997; Neal and Agyeman, 2006](#)), and thus, multiple potential projects for seeing and understanding social and symbolic boundaries in rural spaces. [Halfacree \(1997\)](#), for example, makes the distinction among the industrialized rural, the consumerist rural and the radical rural. Referring back to [Lamont and Molnar \(2002\)](#), the making and remaking of symbolic boundaries may be an important indicator of social change. Thus, understanding how these multiple “representations of the rural” ([Halfacree, 2006:47](#)) are portrayed through images and text, as well as how the boundaries of these meanings are reinforced, blurred, or challenged, can illustrate the dynamism of rural spaces and perhaps reveal evidence of change. Or, to use [Bell's \(2007, p.408\)](#) terminology, what might shifts in the realm of *second rural*—the “ideal moment” of the rural—indicate about changes to the *first rural*, or, the “material moment”? Various representations of the rural may signal contestation and struggle over the meaning of rural places, for example, questions that center on what the rural is and what it ought to be. [Neal \(2009\)](#), for instance, argues that a preoccupation with nature and rural spaces in England signals anxiety about ethnic and national identity. Drawing on an article in *Country Living* about the bygone “nature table” for school children, [Neal \(2009, p.131\)](#) shows how the popular magazine constructs nature as a resource for children—particularly those in urban schools—and how “rural spaces become a potent pre- and post-modern shorthand for security and timelessness” ([2009:135](#)).

Some conceptualizations of the consumerist rural (e.g., [Halfacree, 2010](#)) draw on material culture studies, a field that originated in anthropology and archaeology, and that sees materiality and consumption as fundamental to culture ([Miller, 1987, 1998; Tilley et al., 2006](#)). A primary concern for material culture studies is “the relationship of things to value systems, cosmologies, beliefs and emotions, more broadly to personal and social identities” ([Tilley et al., 2006:4](#)). An example of this approach, although material cultural studies is not explicitly referenced, is a study of gay and lesbian rural idyllisation by [Gorman-Murray et al. \(2012\)](#). The authors found that tourism media constructed urban and rural life, in part, as opposites in narratives of a non-metropolitan gay and lesbian festival in Australia where escape from urban dance club life could be achieved. But in addition to this mythologized binary construction, they also found evidence of hybridization of the urban and rural, in which festival-goers emphasized sentiments of belonging in a “cosmopolitan country” that is “embedded in urban(e) ideals through indulgent consumption practices alongside the health-giving attributes of a place off/for nature” ([2012, p.77](#)). Subjectivity can thus be formed *across* and *beyond* the supposed boundary that renders rural spaces as anti-urban. This perspective aligns with recent work focusing on the increasing spatial and social interdependence of rural and urban spaces (e.g., [Lacour and Puissant, 2007; Lichter and Brown, 2011; Neal, 2013](#)), and specifically the erosion of the rural-urban boundary that results when

“rural goods and services are directed toward and consumed disproportionately by people with strong ties to urban and big-city populations” (Lichter and Brown, 2011, p.574).

As mentioned earlier, we can understand aspects of identity formation by examining popular culture (e.g., Gray, 1995; Storey, 2003). This perspective, referred to as the “politics of representation” (Grindstaff, 2008:210), is based on an interpretivist approach to popular culture, and engages with methods of textual analysis to understand how views about the world can be detected in media sources and how these may influence identity-making processes. Textual analysis can include analysis of visual media as well. In a study of gender in popular culture, Goffman (1979) argued that photographs reveal a different kind of data than text alone, and that the way gender is depicted in advertisements is very similar to how gendered interactions actually play out socially. Of course we must be careful not to assume that the way gender is represented always reflects everyday interactions. But gender representations—both text and visual content—do have real effects. As Brandth (1995:126) points out in her study of tractor advertisements in a widely circulated Norwegian agricultural magazine, “representations are not merely reflections of their sources, but contribute to the shaping of them.” Narratives circulated by mass media about successful farming, for instance, may lead readers to emulate not only the specific agricultural technique featured, but also “personal or affective characteristics” of the farmer (Walter, 1995:59).

In line with feminist work in rural sociology, Walter and Wilson (1996) sought to understand how women were represented in popular agricultural magazines. Similar to our aims in this study, these authors wanted to know how women were depicted in stories of farm success, and the contexts in which women’s practices were highlighted and made central. Analyzing three different magazines—including *Successful Farming*—across multiple points across the 20th century, they found that among the 473 articles analyzed, 63 percent made no mention of women and reinforced a “domestic ideology” (Walter and Wilson, 1996). We wish to extend this important work on gendered rural representations in a more comprehensive study of diverse forms and sources of rural femininities, recognizing the decreasing spatial and social distance between urban and rural places (Lichter and Brown, 2011).

For our purposes, paying attention to the ways that representations of rural femininity are packaged for consumption may illuminate connections between the consumerist rural and the symbolic boundaries that contribute toward the making of identities. Recognizing the tendency in popular culture to portray rural America as the “antithesis of the modern urban world” (Brown and Kandel, 2006; Lichter and Brown, 2011), we are especially interested in how rurality is deployed in the making of feminine identities. This article focuses on how potential struggles over the meaning of rurality articulate with representations of gender.

3.3. Multiple rurals

Within the area of food studies, scholars are increasingly emphasizing the often hidden class and race dimensions of exclusionary food movements and campaigns for localism (e.g., Alkon, 2012; Guthman, 2008; Johnston and Baumann, 2010), movements which are often infused with particular understandings of the rural as an object for consumption. We see a need for greater engagement with gender inequality and intersectional perspectives within the study of rural representation and the multiple meanings of rurality.

Agriculture holds a central place in many definitions of rural, and the relationships and structures around agricultural production are important to our understanding of multiple rural femininities. These structures include differing regimes of

accumulation. We see productivist agriculture as characterized by a primary focus on maximum food and fiber production for the market and achieved through strategies of intensification, concentration, and specialization (Bowler, 1985). In the academic literature as well as more popular forms of media, there is debate about an ongoing, fundamental transition in agriculture from “productivism” to “post-productivism” or “non-productivism” (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992; Holmes, 2006; Marsden et al., 1993; Wilson, 2007). Productivism, defined above by drawing on Bowler (1985), focuses on the maximum output of agricultural products. Post-productivism includes recognition of multiple functions of agriculture such as, market and non-market goods and social, ecological, and economic functions. For instance, Marsden points toward “new rural geographies of value,” which reflect the differing “values placed upon rural areas for different types of tourism or recreation or other forms of industrial or agro-food development” (1999, p.507). These are forms of consumption that together make up the “contemporary consumption countryside” (Marsden, 1999, p.503). This view expands the study of rural areas beyond just agricultural production and consumption, allowing, for example, the focus to shift toward rural-urban “mutual interdependencies and reciprocal flows of people, goods, and services” (Lichter and Brown, 2011, p. 584). Simultaneously, Marsden (1999) stresses the diversity of rural areas, a concern that we share in our analysis of how different meanings attached to rural life may yield different forms of rural femininity.

Evident in popular blogs and magazines, such as *City Farmhouse* (citycountrylife.com) and *Modern Farmer* (Haughney, 2013), rurality has acquired a cultural prestige that seems particularly powerful today. The online store, *Rust and Honey* (rustandhoney.com), sells “farmhouse chic” items, such as decorative burlap pillows (priced at \$49 each) and Mason jar night lights (\$18 each). In an online gallery of photos, *Country Living* features “Feed Sack Chic” décor: “Used to transport grain and other dry goods, these humble bags have inspired high-style accessories” (Dodell-Feder, 2015). This rural-inspired style is paired with a hip, countryside sensibility that entails support for local organic farms and knowing “where your food comes from” (see Guthman, 2008), and extends to advice for small-scale entrepreneurship (e.g., thefarmchicks.com) as well as resources for mothers and mothers-to-be (e.g., naturebaby.com).

The emergence of this cultural trend presents an opportunity for scholars of rural studies to examine a new version of rural femininity, one that is not necessarily found in rural places, but rather, exemplifies the deteriorating urban–rural boundary that recent scholarship has suggested (e.g., Lichter and Brown, 2011). Changing producer and consumer relationships, including market values for qualities of the rural that may have at one time been recognized as non-market functions, are important for our analysis of changing rural femininities. To the degree that rural landscapes and populations are undergoing transformation, we might expect changes in representations of rurality and femininity. And, given that we have reason to believe that the rural is being imagined and consumed differently by non-rural populations, we focus on the gendered character of this imagination and consumption, and what it means for various types of femininity.

4. Symbolic and cultural representations of rural femininities

4.1. Productivist rural femininity

Compared to Walter and Wilson’s (1996) analysis of *Successful Farming*, we found a similarly gendered pattern in our study of the magazine from 2011. On average, men were featured in just over 41 pictures per issue in both advertisements and articles. By comparison, pictures of women in stories and advertisements averaged

at under one-third that of men, at just over 12 per issue. Somewhat surprisingly, women authored over 43 percent of the articles in *Successful Farming* on average across all 2011 issues. With very few exceptions—for instance, an article and photo about women farming in the global South (January 2011, p.70)—people pictured appeared to be white.

Successful Farming generally portrayed the version of rurality that Halfacree (1997) identifies as industrialist, with images that center on the productivist goals of maximum food and fiber production for the market, achieved through strategies of intensification, concentration, and specialization. What Bell (2004) describes as “monologic Big Ag masculinity” looms large in *Successful Farming*, and is perhaps best illustrated by advertisements for pesticides and herbicides that are frequently included in traditional productivist agricultural publications. Multiple images of men’s mastery in (and of) rural places, such as a giant man’s hand hovering above a field of crops, squeezing rain from a cloud (August 2011, p.47), or the constant war of “Man vs. Weed” (February 2011, p.2), all confirm what Brandth described as the representation of men as “controllers of nature” in her analysis of tractor advertisements (1995, p.132). This hegemonic rural masculinity of Big Ag, with its unilateral approach to communication, does not question conventional farm methods (Bell, 2004). These images, taken together with the underrepresentation of women in picture content, suggest the construction of symbolic boundaries around the kind of rurality most valorized, as well as the kind of person who can be a main decision-maker on farms. Industrial agriculture dominates meanings of rurality, and men and masculinity dominate the image of the “successful farmer.”

Turning to representations of women in *Successful Farming*, our findings resonate with what Walter and Wilson (1996) described as the general upholding of the “domestic ideology.” The observed complement to the “Big Ag masculinity” in this magazine is mainly *emphasized femininity* (Connell, 1987), or what scholars have also referred to as *hegemonic femininity* (Schippers, 2007). This femininity is a rural variant, in other words, a *hegemonic rural femininity*. Just as hegemonic femininity carries the most power in shaping feminine norms in a particular context (Schippers, 2007), it is hegemonic rural femininity that has the greatest influence on shaping feminine norms in rural places. Yet hegemonic femininities, like hegemonic masculinities, are multiple and vary according to place and time (Messerschmidt, 2010). In our analysis of images and text in *Successful Farming*, we identified the basic characteristics of a kind of hegemonic rural femininity featured most prominently that we refer to as a *productivist rural femininity*: relatively little involvement in the major decisions made on the farm; accountable for the care and health of family; and responsible for the “soft skills” of problem-solving among male stakeholders in the farm business, as well as maintaining communication off the farm.

Women in *Successful Farming* were depicted as engaged in productivist agriculture, but overwhelmingly in positions in accordance with “helpmate” rather than as major players. This secondary role was evident by the general underrepresentation of women in visual content, as noted above. In pictures, women were sometimes shown as partners in productive activities on the farm, yet they were most often depicted as a helper and not the main focus of the activity. For instance, in most of the 2011 issues of *Successful Farming* there was a farm family featured and a photo-montage of a sort of “day-in-the-life” depiction of their activities. In the January issue six photographs were included in this photo-montage section, three of which were placed at the top of the page and portrayed solitary men working with harvested corn, one of a girl and boy bedding sheep in a barn, and at the bottom of the page was a photo of a woman sitting at a computer doing bookwork and another photo of a grandmother baking cookies with children

(January 2011, p.66). Although certainly critical to the farm business, bookkeeping is included toward the bottom of the page, alongside childcare duties. Women were pictured in other places in the magazine engaged in bookkeeping, yet this activity was not given the same centrality as the men’s machine work that was so often pictured as integral to the operation.

Women were especially portrayed as secondary in action and decision-making around technology and machinery. For example, an advertisement for Pioneer seed products features a woman as part of the decision making process, seated at a table across from a company representative, with the heading, “Matching the right product to the right acre starts with a meeting of the minds” (September 2011, p.26–7). Yet the woman is sitting beside her husband or partner in the peripheral zone of the action, seemingly taking a supportive role, her eyes fixed on her partner’s face and smiling as he and the salesperson face each other directly and are engaged in a “meeting of the minds” on the particulars of Pioneer agricultural technology.

A few photos and articles depicted women engaged directly in agricultural activities, such as a featured story about an Ohio State University college student who returns home on weekends to farm with her father, grandfather, and uncles (February 2011, p.65). The heading is “Farming in Her Blood,” and the woman is quoted in the article, speaking authoritatively about the use of no-till cropping practices. Yet this woman-centered story on agricultural methods was not the norm in *Successful Farming*. Perhaps noteworthy is the ad that appears just below this short feature. There were rarely pictures of women in the magazine operating large-scale farming equipment, yet here we see a woman operating a Grasshopper lawn mower. This fits with the characterization of women as responsible for the home, including the lawn and flower garden. This is evident in an advertisement for a small green house, featuring a woman holding a plant in the doorway (March 2011, p. 85).

Women were also depicted as primarily responsible for the health and overall wellbeing of the farm family. One advertisement featured a “home-cooked and hearty” crockpot and the “Busy Woman’s Slow Cooker Cookbook,” (January 2011, p.61), and a different issue included a photo of two young women in a 4H cooking competition (Mid-March 2011, p.68), implying that women are held accountable for making meals. Each issue included a “Family” section which, although not expressly stated, appeared to be geared towards women specifically, with recipes and health tips, as well as advertisements for mail-order flower bulbs. These photographs clearly enforce the hegemonic femininity (and overwhelmingly, hegemonic masculinity) of productivist rural life. There were some photos depicting men engaged in childcare, for instance an image of a little boy leaning in for a hug from his grandfather (February 2011, p.68), but the vast majority of photos of children featured women as caretakers of children, for instance the photo described above of a grandmother baking cookies with children (January 2011, p.66), a woman putting socks on a little boy (February 2011, p.68), or the title of an article about family changes, “Look, Mom, you’re an empty nester” (May–June 2011, p.57).

Along with the household responsibilities of taking care of the home, caring for children, and feeding the family, women in *Successful Farming* magazine were also characterized and depicted as managing the community relationships both on and off the farm. For instance, one issue includes a picture depicting a husband and wife standing in a yard with cattle, with the woman holding a clipboard that says, “Learning ways to improve communication” (May–June 2011, p.32). There was also a gendered expectation for women’s commitment to managing the public image of agriculture, made clear in an advertisement featuring a female journalist for the U.S. Farmer and Rancher Alliance (October 2011, p.29), and in a photo of women interfacing with female customers to represent

and protect productivist agriculture from criticism as they “put a friendly face on farming and food producers” (April 2011, p.15).

The images of femininity and masculinity in *Successful Farming* match well with other research on the gendered division of labor in productivist agricultural systems. There is an extensive scholarship on this issue. Meares (1997) provides a clear overview of the literature and in her article discusses three types of work on family farms: productive, reproductive, and community managing. Women’s dominant sphere is reproductive and community managing, while men’s time and efforts are largely concentrated in the productive sphere (Meares, 1997, p.35). Similarly, a study of Wisconsin dairy farms (Vogt et al., 2001) found that most farm women were responsible for farm bookkeeping and bill paying on the farm. Other findings of the gendered division of labor on productivist farms included: farm errands and vegetable gardening were common tasks for farm women; women were more likely to work with livestock than do field work; and, women tended to perform tasks requiring manual labor rather than those with machinery. Almost two-thirds of the farm women participating in the study contributed more than forty hours a week of on-farm work, and many farm women took off-farm jobs to obtain health insurance for the family and increase household income, making clear contributions to the operation (Vogt et al., 2001). The 2006 Life Satisfaction and Dairy Farming survey in Wisconsin also indicated a highly gendered division of labor, especially in certain tasks. Men were most likely to have sole responsibility for fixing machinery, moving fences, managing milk contracts, and hauling manure. Women had responsibility over cooking food, household cleaning and shopping, as well as childcare (Lloyd et al., 2006).

Yet there is evidence to suggest that women are increasingly taking the reins in agricultural production, indicated by the growth in women farm operators, who now run roughly 14% of farms nationwide as principal operator and account for 30% of all farm operators (USDA, 2014a, 2014b). Though women do tend to operate smaller farms compared to men (USDA, 2014c), given this overall growth and the corresponding attention in the media, we would expect more noticeable shifts in representations of women in *Successful Farming*. But, comparing our updated findings to Walter and Wilson’s (1996) study, it is clear that the supportive productivist femininity remains as a persistent gender configuration in the representation of agriculture in this widely read trade publication, demarcating the symbolic boundary around who can and cannot be a farmer with decision-making power.

4.2. Transformative country chic

Our quantitative findings show that women dominate the images and authorial content of *Country Living* magazine. On average, women were featured in just over 49 pictures in each issue from 2011, while men were pictured in just over 27 pictures. Women also tended to write the vast majority of the articles, averaging at just under 10 articles per issue, while men authored an average of 3.5 articles per issue. Most people featured in *Country Living* appeared to be white, yet a few multiracial families were pictured in editorial content and advertising.

In the March 2011 special issue of *Country Living*, titled “What’s Country Now,” editor in chief Sarah Gray Miller, pictured wearing a black-and-white gingham shirt and posing in front of what looks like a freshly whitewashed wooden shed, declares that “rural is the new urbane” (p.8). She explains that “this issue focuses on an unexpected epicenter of cool: America’s heartland” (p.8). Miller goes on to describe the negative reaction she used to receive from New Yorkers when telling them of her Mississippi roots. By contrast, she notes that, “Nowadays, the most sophisticated restaurant in my Manhattan neighborhood is a comfort-food joint called Red

Rooster” (p.8). In this section we highlight that with this apparent cultural shift toward all things country comes a particular type of rural femininity—a version that is illustrated as desirable, hip, and constructed using symbolic class boundaries.

When flipping through the pages of *Country Living*, with its focus on home decorating and cooking, we identified a distinct type of rural femininity. This rural femininity shares several of the characteristics of the *Successful Farming* portrayal of femininity. Across both publications, women are viewed as shouldering the greatest responsibility for children, family obligations, and the home generally. For instance, each issue analyzed features a “Making a Country Living” section, in which women have opened businesses that allow them the flexibility to meet childcare duties, such as the “enterprising mom” who “quit the corporate grind to start an all-natural bath line for kids” (May 2011, p.30). Among the issues we analyzed, men were rarely featured in this section, nor were they portrayed as attempting to find work-family balance, as these women were. This gendered pattern suggests that women were viewed as primary caretakers, just as in *Successful Farming*.

But instead of complementing a productivist agricultural ideology, as in *Successful Farming*, the specific type of rural that shapes this femininity is different; this femininity is about the rural as a product to consume. In contrast to the industrialist agriculture from *Successful Farming*, this is the “consumerist rural” (Halfacree, 1997) or the “contemporary consumption countryside” (Marsden, 1999:503) that has come to be associated with post-Fordism. Using the example from *Country Living* above, readers are taught that consuming the rural can empower women to be better mothers, better able to meet the demands that the “supermom” imperative dictates. Consumption of the rural can, in other words, lead to becoming rural—without crossing any class boundaries—and can entail a powerful and transformative shift to one’s identity.

In this publication, pages were devoted to constructing a distinctly rural femininity from a more modern, and perhaps paradoxically, less hip, non-rural femininity. The magazine is filled with strategies to transform women’s femininity into a more rustic, “down-home” and quaint femininity, and this comes with plenty of rural imagery and language. Using the tips in this magazine, readers can visit country antique sales, purchase farm benches for the home and cook up “haute comfort foods,” such as Macaroni and Gruyere Cheese (March 2011, p.119)—in other words, consume the countryside—to cultivate and achieve a different femininity for themselves. This is what we have categorized as *transformative country chic*. We focus on several ways in which *Country Living* makes this special kind of rural femininity available to its readers: finding a country home, decorating, leisure and country cooking. An analysis of these mechanisms for attaining *transformative country chic* reveals the symbolic class boundaries that are etched and maintained in *Country Living*, valorizing particular countryside practices, aesthetics, lifestyles and foods. Further, in line with work in material culture studies (Miller, 1987, 1998), we found that *Country Living* magazine, as an object to be consumed, was closely tied with identity formation, assigning a positive cultural value to rural pursuits and goods, value that appears to enhance femininity and perhaps empowers women.

A frequent theme in *Country Living* is nurturing the desire to live in a country home. For example, “Trina had been dreaming since her youth of living in an old farmhouse” (Dec 2011–Jan 2012, p.83). Often this desire is framed in the context of women wanting a second home as a respite from bustling city life. For example, in the May 2011 issue, one editor discusses the purchase of a bargain-priced second home in the country (p.10). And, in each issue a “Real Estate Sampler” section lists the selling price and desirable features of available homes across the U.S. Each listed property has a certain country or small-town quality that carries special

currency in the listing, such as a “converted barn” (June 2011, p.72), or “main street addresses” that “capture the spirit of small-town America” (April 2011, p.84).

The information that *Country Living* supplies to its readers in order to facilitate what we argue is a transformation into country chic femininity, does not stop at country property listings, and in fact ventures into whole career shifts. Each issue includes a subsection entitled, “Making a Country Living,” which features women entrepreneurs selling country-inspired goods. Whether they are making their own ice cream from “regional farms” (June 2011, p.24), or a “line of eco-friendly cleaning products” (November 2011, p.22), these women are often depicted as having left fast-paced careers in urban centers to transform themselves into a “country”-inspired professional. Each magazine advertises books written by “The Farm Chicks,” described as “Momprenuers” who launched their own line of household products. “Making a country living,” for instance, makes the reader a better mother.

The way that *Country Living* supplies readers with the tools to find their own country home, away from busy urban centers, lines up with the themes of “escape” and “fantasy” that we found to be prominent in this magazine. The publishers of *Country Living* seem to be well aware of these themes, describing what the magazine offers to its readers as follows: “Country is a state of mind, not a place. No matter where they live—rural areas, suburbs, or even the city—*Country Living*’s 11 million readers share the same fantasy: a laid-back lifestyle in which fresh-cut grass, porch swings, and farmers’ market peaches replace deadlines and cell phones. For these busy women, the magazine offers the ultimate escape route from today’s 24/7 pace” (GfK MRI, 2011). Besides confirming that the publication is indeed marketed toward women, this description offers a depiction of the rural as “fantasy,” as “escape,” and paradoxically, as untethered to a specific geographic location. After all, you can transport yourself to the “country” just by flipping through the pages of *Country Living*. This depiction falls in line with what rural studies scholars have described as the “rural idyll” (e.g., Gorman-Murray et al., 2012). This hybrid cultural construction is also evident in popular websites and blogs, such as *Modern Farmer*. This cosmopolitan form of rurality aligns with what we found in the pages of *Country Living*.

The sense of escape that imbues the meaning of “country” in this magazine extends to the types of leisure activities recommended to readers. For example, the “haycation” phenomenon is mentioned often in the magazine. As an example:

The Rustic Culinary Retreat: Head to: Daingerfield, Texas, lies two hours and a world away from Dallas. Visit working cattle ranch Greer Farm for a hands-on lesson—literally—in farm-to-table cooking. May’s theme: East Texas strawberries. Stay At: Greer Farm rents four log cabins, all fronting a private 11-acre lake. Spend at least two nights, and the owners will stock your kitchen with homemade jam and bread. It’ll cost: \$39 each (a one-bedroom cabin sleeps up to four, for \$155 a night). (May 2011, p.82).

“Country”-inspired vacations also take place, perhaps unexpectedly, in urban centers. In one issue, *Country Living* features a Brooklyn culinary school, where readers are encouraged to “channel your inner Laura Ingalls as you learn to can peaches and pickles, carve up a pig, or perfect piecrust at one of the many hands-on classes held at this cooking school and kitchen-supply store” (March 2011, p.68).

If purchasing a second home in the country is not an option, or if the reader has already purchased their rural haven and now need to decorate, *Country Living* supplies countless country-inspired decorating tips. For example, the following is an ad in *Country*

Living for a decorating book:

Create a New ‘Old’ House: You’re drawn to the romance and character of an old house—but still want the space, convenience and efficiency of a new one. Why choose? With hundreds of photographs, ideas, and tips, our new book *Aged to Perfection* makes it simple to give any modern home (even a city apartment!) that perfect touch of gracious, rustic charm. It’s the best of both worlds (Dec–Jan 2011, p.28).

In other issues, we found specific decorating tips that include using chicken wire: “Chicken wire chic: the familiar farm motif comes home to roost in high style” ... “A chicken wire overlay looks uncommonly elegant atop a hyper-literate shade” (shade priced at \$455 from shadesoflight.com). Or ceramic butter molds shaped like farm animals, “All in the Details: Butter Molds bring Barnyard Charm to the Table” (March 2011, p.24). This specific kind of décor has come to be referred to, according to *Country Living*, as “feed sack chic” by “with-it designers” (March 2011, p.8). Bringing a little country into your life is hip, “in”, and seemingly irresistible. The idea that “country” or “rural” femininity is something to be consumed was particularly clear in the advertisement for pecan pie filling which we found at least once in each issue of 2011 *Country Living*. The full-page ad for the Country Living Collection features a photograph of a jar, with the neat handwritten label in cursive, “County Fair Pecan Pie in a Jar.” At the front left is a whole pecan pie and in the background sits a bowl of freshly whipped cream, with the tagline: “Homemade. Made easy” (Dec–Jan. 2011, p.23). The message is that the reader can in fact purchase “country”—at least, the *Country Living* version of it—and consume it with ease, straight out of a jar.

What version of “country” or “rural” is featured as legitimate or desirable in *Country Living*? In the October 2011 issue, in the editor’s note, Sarah Gray Miller tells readers, “What was once just my country retreat is fast becoming the magazine’s go-to photo studio.” Miller explains that when a photo shoot needs more “authenticity,” the production team heads to her Hudson Valley “getaway” to photograph in an “honest-to-goodness country kitchen” (p.8). For the editorial team, then, authentic rurality is achieved by using Miller’s second home in upstate New York as a backdrop that communicates “real” country to their readers.” It may not be completely clear what counts as authentic country in *Country Living*, but if Miller’s retreat is taken as the prototype, authentic country is located at her second home in a town two hours north of Manhattan.

But Miller’s Hudson Valley escape is not the only place where authentic country can be found. In this magazine urban spaces can surely exude “small town charm” through food, history, and design aesthetic. This is evident in “Brooklyn’s Country Credentials,” (March 2011, p.67), an article explaining that “with its mom-and-pop shops, bluegrass joints, and working farms,” and its agricultural history when “farmers grew everything from potatoes to kale,” Brooklyn today “still feels more heartland than Big Apple, with ribbon-worthy pie cafes hanging out shingles next to soda shops and general stores” (p.68). In a photograph accompanying the article, an ethnically diverse group of smiling customers sit in a dining area with high ceilings, vintage-looking tin walls, and rustic-style wooden tables, with the following caption: “Raised in South Dakota, sisters Melissa and Emily Elsen rely on local, organic ingredients to bake up some of the best pies on the planet” (March 2011, p.72). Just as Miller brings credibility to the magazine with her Mississippi roots, the Elsen sisters bake a more authentic pie with their prairie origins. At another point in this issue, Miller notes that the “timeless traditions of farm-fresh produce, handcrafted furniture, and roots music” can be found in big cities, but also in

“hotbeds in places like Alabama and Illinois, Colorado and Kansas, Minnesota and yes, Mississippi” (March 2011, p.8). So although New York City may not be a “hotbed” of rural activity, *Country Living* sees the country as transportable, just as we noted above, as a “state of mind, not a place” (GfK MRI, 2011).

And the title of one section of every issue, “The Heart of the Country: The Best the Countryside has to Offer ...,” a section which advertises a collection of different knick-knacks and household items, is a nod to the authenticity of the countryside that readers apparently seek. It is after all, the “heart” of the countryside that *Country Living* perceives these readers are after, not an off-shoot or an imitation. In the March 2011 issue, the magazine featured “the latest trends” in country-inspired food, furniture, and music, with a special wink to the *Country Living* reader:

At this particular magazine, we’ve never doubted country’s cool quotient, but suddenly everybody else seems to have gotten the memo, from hip designers to famous chefs. So we figured it was high time to salute the 25 people, projects and products redefining *rustic* today. Then we dove deeper, with features on haute comfort food, the “haycation” trend, and homes that break every decorating rule, beautifully. Consider it all proof that you, dear CL reader, are way ahead of the curve (March 2011, p.82).

So wherever the reader may be living, authentic country spaces share a focus on food made from scratch with local, organic ingredients, a charming rural history, and country-inspired design. This construction of authentic country is classed and gendered, and contributes toward a particular kind of rural femininity that is both cosmopolitan, timeless, and supremely coveted.

But to what extent is the “country” femininity sold in the pages of *Country Living* based on actual, material rural—or what Bell (2007) terms “first rural”—understandings? It appears to us that the *Country Living* version of rural is less about the way the rural actually is, and more about non-rural based constructions of what rural “ought” to be. Bryant and Pini (2011) argue that “the rural idyll is critical to defining who is included in, and who is excluded from, rural spaces” and that “those who fit within hegemonic (re) constructions of rurality are the authentic protagonists in rural life; those who do not are marginal, for they are seen as lacking and illegitimate” (2011:6–7). True, *Country Living* does feature “real” people in their “Make a Country Living” sections. But often these people are not actually living in rural places. They are consuming the rural, and creating a hip, chic rural for urban and suburban women to consume. And those featured in the magazine who do own country homes are presented in a way that makes much of their actual rural surroundings invisible. There are countless references to local foods, farmers’ markets, and barnyard sales, but seldom to zero mention of industrial agriculture, immigrant farm workers, pesticide drift, rural poverty, food deserts, or the driving up of farmland prices due to the migration of city and suburban folk eager to find the “country” they see in *Country Living*.

The subtle insistence for readers to “buy local” reveals an implicit message about socioeconomic status. Without an explicit understanding of why, the message in *Country Living* is that buying local and buying independent makes one morally superior, and that women are best poised to receive this message. Being a worthy and patriotic consumer of the heartland does not include, for example, shopping at Walmart for household goods. The reality that many rural families cannot afford, much less access, American made goods from independent shops is glossed over in *Country Living*, as a symbolic boundary is erected that very much conveys a sense of morality. Doing the right thing as a consumer is only possible, it seems, for those who have the extra income. In other words, attaining the *transformative country chic femininity* means the

possession of a form of cultural capital accessible only to those of a certain class status.

5. Discussion

In our analysis of *Successful Farming* and *Country Living*, we identified distinct forms of rural femininities, contributing to a concentrated focus on femininity within rural studies (e.g., Brandth, 1994; Kazyak, 2012; Keller, 2014). *Successful Farming* was characterized by the *productivist* rural femininity, with an emphasis on little involvement in major farm decisions, crafting solutions to communication problems, and accountability for the health and wellbeing of the family. By contrast, *Country Living* promoted the *transformative country chic* femininity, guiding readers toward finding a country home, career shifts, decorating, leisure and country cooking. Our findings suggested that both magazines relied on the gendered division of labor to construct rural femininities, but that *Country Living* tended to use symbols of social class to portray desirable rural femininity, more so than *Successful Farming*. These findings highlight that there are no straight-forward definitions of *rural femininity*, as variants can be derived from different sources and carry differently classed and gendered connotations.

As Lamont and Molnar (2002) and Schippers (2007) note, symbolic elements are critical in shaping social relations of gender. Whereas both sources used representations to reinforce the social boundary between women and men, *Country Living* used its images and text to suggest a particularly classed understanding of the countryside, a version that is coveted and only affordable to those with economic means. We therefore conclude that different rural femininities have different kinds of social boundary projects, depending on the makers of the representations, their objectives, and the expected audience. In this sense, our study meets the call by Lamont and Molnar (2002) for more work on the “cultural narratives” that inform the “reproduction of gender boundaries” (p. 177).

Whereas *Successful Farming* portrays rural femininity as a supportive practice that helps to prop up rural masculinities, *Country Living*’s portrayal paints femininity as an active part of constructing rural place and rural life, even as it relies on idealized representations of rurality to do so. These findings conflict with suggestions that other scholars have made regarding the masculine underpinnings of rurality (e.g., Kazyak, 2012). While femininity is clearly portrayed as a background practice in *Successful Farming*—a publication rooted in rural places and rural lives—there is nevertheless a more complex story to tell when we consider that ruralities are, of course, multiple and varied. Skimming the pages of *Country Life*, the rural is clearly infused with femininity. This version of sellable rurality is apparently geared toward the urban or suburban consumer, but it is no less feminine because of its capitalist motivation. Doing rurality in this context is about doing femininity, contrary to other claims (e.g., Kazyak, 2012). As Campbell et al. (2006) note, rural masculinities are relational. They shape and are shaped by rural femininities, and other gender practices that may not fit in binary frameworks. It is in our view, then, that a focus on rural masculinity that does not incorporate femininity is incomplete. Our findings thus provide a more comprehensive picture of how gender informs representations of rurality.

Juxtaposing images and text from these two magazines, we see similarities in the two worlds represented, but we also see a distinct lack of mutual recognition. *Country Living* inspires its readers to adopt a *transformative country chic* femininity. This entails starting country-inspired businesses, buying local and supporting small-scale agriculture, while avoiding any mention of industrial agriculture, or the concerns and challenges that rural populations face,

such as disappearing farmland. Evident in our findings is thus a struggle over what the rural means. This struggle has two main points of connection in the rural sociological scholarship. First, we find common ground with Marsden (1999) and his articulation of the “contemporary consumption countryside,” which he introduces with an insistence that rural areas are not homogenous and we thus should not expect “new rural geographies of value” to carry the same currency from place to place. Although our analysis is not tied to a particular rural place, it is clear that each publication attaches different sets of meanings to rurality, and we can envision how these differences might lead to conflicts within and across particular rural spaces over the value of “new rural geographies.”

Second, the struggle over the meaning of rurality cannot be completely disentangled from tensions over meanings of femininity. Rural femininities are undergoing change, and with the mobility of the “rural” brand—also known as, “feed sack chic” (March 2011, p.8)—we see symbols of rurality entering households in urban spaces to be consumed (for example, the ubiquitous mason jar), shaping the construction of non-rural femininities. These changes are historically specific. In the U.S. today there is more emphasis than ever before on the moral charge to “know where your food comes from,” and this has impacts on women’s lives and the types of femininity that are viewed as *desirable*, *good for families*, and *good for children*. It is imperative that we recognize the privilege associated with that kind of femininity: time, money, and education. Further, buying American and keeping dollars in local economies is often viewed as one strategy to ease the country’s economic woes, whether or not localism is viewed as a “trap” (Born and Purcell, 2006). Because it is women who disproportionately carry the burden of household shopping, it is women (and femininity) that are targeted most with calls for healthy eating and local consumerism (e.g., Bowen et al., 2014). This underscores the need for more research that further specifies the gender imbalance in new (and old) articulations of rural meanings.

Finally, our findings align with Marsden’s perspective that rural areas are diverse in the forms that they take, and that “they are affected in different ways and extents by the various trends affecting society in general and how the diversity of local rural conditions articulates with general processes (yielding a range of local outcomes)” (1999, p.504). This view opens the door to designing future research projects that juxtapose cultural representations of rural femininity with ethnographic field work that examines the everyday practices of rural femininity among urban and countryside dwellers alike. Given the connections between cultural consumption and identity formation, a study that would extend our findings would interview readers of these magazines to understand how they interpret representations of femininity and rurality. Interviews with the makers of these publications would also yield interesting findings about the choices behind mass media content and what factors influence those choices.

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