

The Question of Rural Masculinities*

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ABSTRACT By way of introduction to this special issue on rural masculinities, we provide an overview of masculinity studies, emphasizing the influential work of Robert W. Connell on hegemonic masculinity. We go on to distinguish between two main avenues of rural inquiry in masculinity studies: studies of the masculine in the rural and studies of the rural in the masculine, or what we also term the *masculine rural* and the *rural masculine*. We apply this distinction to the six contributions to this special issue, showing how most of the papers maintain a kind of dialogue between the two. We conclude by arguing that studies of rural masculinities are a contribution rather than an alternative to feminist scholarship in the rural social sciences, and that the topic of rural masculinities provides rural scholarship with opportunities for conducting research in other disciplines.

Rural masculinity is hardly a typical topic of rural social science. Indeed, it is a somewhat uncomfortable subject. Probably almost all of those few researchers who have conducted work on rural masculinity can report awkward moments of trying to explain to friends, family members, research participants, and even colleagues what it is and why social scientists would want to conduct studies on it. There is something unexpected, faintly disturbing, occasionally humorous, and not a little suspicious in investigating that which we have always seen and yet have overlooked so often.

This special issue may not make rural masculinity—or, more appropriately, rural masculinities—any less awkward a research topic. That awkwardness, however, should suggest to us something of the political and moral charge of the social boundaries that the topic both highlights and helps to transcend. At any rate, identifying social boundaries and providing the analytic apparatus for their potential social transcendence are the principal goals of the research represented in this issue of *Rural Sociology*.

This special issue came about through one of those chance encounters that one hopes for at professional meetings, and sometimes actually experiences. (In this case the encounter was mediated by a third party, Greg Peter, who suggested that we contact

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each other.) A few e-mails later, the special issue was born. From the beginning, we conceived it as an international and interdisciplinary forum for research on rural masculinities. In the winter and spring of 1998 we solicited abstracts from scholars in several countries who we knew were working in this area and from a number of gender-oriented professional listservers. In the end we received 18 abstracts from seven different countries, mainly from younger scholars in a range of disciplines. This total indicated to us a far greater interest in rural masculinities research than we had suspected.

We were thrilled, of course. For various reasons, not all the authors were in a position to complete papers, and we as editors had some difficult decisions to make among those who did so. Although we were able to accommodate only six papers in this special issue because of space constraints, it is a testament to the overall quality of the pool that all of those six sailed through the external review process with hardly a glitch. And, given the number of younger scholars in that pool, and indeed in the final six (depending on how generous one wants to be with the term *younger!*), the future looks good for research on rural masculinities.

In the following discussion we will try to sketch the theoretical contours of rural masculinities as a research domain, placing it in the context of gender studies, feminism, poststructuralism, and rural research in general. Along the way, we will also provide a brief overview of the articles as an invitation to the reader to read, reflect, and debate on their contributions to rural scholarship—contributions that we believe are considerable.

Studying Masculinity

The idea of masculinity as a topic for academic analysis emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in response to a number of changes in the work process, household composition, the labor market, and the political agenda in Western society. In the media there emerged a popular sentiment that organization man was in crisis—a concern that Savran (1998) argues was emerging as early as the 1950s. Men had become alienated. They could not live up to the expectations of their “sex role” and were generally suffering from an “identity crisis.”

These popular ideas eventually gave rise to a body of academic work that sought to engage the insights of the social sciences with this concern about a purported masculine crisis in Western society (Law, Campbell, and Schick 1999). The important year was 1987, which saw the publication of Brod (1987), Kaufman (1987), and Kimmel (1987) in the United States; Connell (1987) in Australia; and Phillips ([1987] 1996) in New Zealand. The basic point of commonality between these authors was the idea that masculinity was

not an essentialist biological or psychological state; it did not reside in a monolithic "sex role" which was in "crisis." Rather, masculinity was "socially constructed" in different societal and historical spaces. Consequently, to understand masculinity, one had to understand how masculinity was variably constructed as a social phenomenon.

The social construction of masculinity remains the key insight of the emergent field of research into masculinities. Nevertheless, a difference in emphasis soon arose between those who viewed the study of masculinities as an adjunct to the wider feminist critique of gender relations (e.g., Connell 1987, 1995; Hearn 1987; Kimmel 1987) and those who tended to see the study of masculinities as a more autonomous field of social inquiry, in which a fuller understanding of masculinities was needed to emancipate men as well as women (e.g., Brod 1994; Brod and Kaufman 1994; Kaufman 1987).

This mild divergence within the study of masculinities was emphasized by an even wider division between two more radical positions to the right and the left. On the right, popular authors such as Robert Bly (1990), Sam Keen (1991), and Warren Farrell (1994) became heroes of the new antifeminist men's movement in the United States: they advocated an essentialist psychology of a masculinity which had been compromised by recent social change and by direct feminist attacks and which needed to "rediscover" its primal roots, as described by Clatterbaugh (1997). On the left, many feminist scholars questioned whether male academics studying masculinity could distance themselves methodologically from the blinding power of patriarchal privilege (see Canaan and Griffin 1990; Seidler 1990, 1991). Consequently the emergence of men's studies in the curricula of many universities—particularly in the United States—has been met with skepticism by a wide range of feminist scholars. This is exacerbated by the decline in the significance of a politicized profeminist men's movement, in favor of an antifeminist agenda for reclaiming political ground "captured by feminists" (Clatterbaugh 1997; Savran 1998).

Despite these concerns about the neoconservative agenda of men's studies, a critical approach to the study of masculinity has been established in an array of existing academic disciplines including sociology (Connell 1995), history (Roper and Tosh 1991), art (Perchuk and Posner 1995), anthropology (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994), and media studies (Craig 1992). Consequently it has become possible to distinguish what some have called the "new men's studies," which is concerned primarily with the problems of men, from what we would like to call "masculinity studies," which is concerned about the problems posed by masculinities for everyone, men and women alike.

Whatever the name, this special issue belongs very much to the latter tradition of critical inquiry into masculinities. The goal of the is-

sue, however, is not to provide a comprehensive review of all the developments in masculinity studies. (For a more comprehensive review, see Law, Campbell, and Schick 1999.) Instead the authors represented here wish to examine how the critical analysis of the social constitution of masculinities can enhance our understanding of gender and power relations—particularly how they are embedded in rural spaces or incorporate the rural as a symbolic entity. Nevertheless, a suitable place to begin such a critical analysis is with the concept of “hegemonic masculinity,” probably the most widely used term in masculinity studies, rural or otherwise.

Studying Hegemonic Masculinity

In the literature on masculinity, the term “hegemonic masculinity”—originally attributed to Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) but most consistently associated with the body of work by Australian sociologist Bob Connell—has come to signify a general commitment to understanding masculinity as a critical adjunct to feminist analyses of power. By examining this much used (and sometimes abused) term, some of the key theoretical insights pertaining to recent masculinity theory can be addressed. Throughout this literature, a simple definition of this term usually resembles Connell’s (1995:74) statement that: “Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations.” Hegemonic masculinity is therefore the version of masculinity that is considered legitimate, “natural,” or unquestionable in a particular set of gender relations. By moving towards hegemony theory, Connell shifted the focus of analysis away from *men* as a social group and towards *masculinities*: the subjective ideas and sets of practices that enable some men to achieve and protect a hegemonic position (see Law, Campbell, and Schick [1999:25–27]). This shift in focus had wide repercussions that echo well beyond the initial ideas behind the term. Through the 1980s and 90s, the idea of hegemonic masculinity has become the “ghost in the machine” of the majority of recent writings on masculinity; it is the theoretical signifier or token of at least four interrelated developments in the theorization of masculinity.

First, hegemonic masculinity represents a break with the notion of the “sex role.” Carrigan et al. (1985) criticized “sex role” theory as a simplistic concept which ignored power relations by describing masculinity and femininity in ahistorical terms, which concentrated on attributes rather than on practices, and which reinforced “oppositional assumptions,” as Kimmel (1987:122) put it. “Sex role” theory defined “men’s problems” as involving poor role socialization and the difficulties of living up to the demands of the male “sex role.” Carrigan et al. (1985) offered the notion of hegemonic

masculinity as a way to understand masculine power as something which (like the "sex role") was constituted socially, but which varied dramatically in different social milieus and was imbued with the inequities (and instabilities) of power characteristic of Western society.

The second strand in the emerging theorization of hegemonic masculinity is the issue of masculine "invisibility." This idea has been borrowed directly from feminist theory. The notion of masculine invisibility was termed by Donna Harraway (1991:189) the "god-trick" of masculinity: being everywhere, and yet unseen and unmarked (see also Matahaere-Atariki 1999). Masculinity has long tended to be the dominant norm of society, invisibly generic, an unmarked category of power. Few people, for example, take explicit note of male politicians' gender because this is the generic norm, whereas the gender of female politicians is discussed constantly (Law, Campbell, and Schick 1999). Masculinity is thus invisible, while femininity is continually marked for special emphasis.

Although this observation actually originated from the development of relational theories of gender in feminist analysis, it fits neatly with the intentions of hegemony theory. A relational understanding of gender seeks to articulate how gender categories are constructed *in relation* to each other, rather than in some form of autonomous process of social construction. A relational view of gender explicitly attempts to render men's invisible normality a visible category (Kimmel 1990), but not a passive one. Rather, it seeks to understand the invisibility of masculine power as something that is actively constructed.

This approach has clear parallels to notions of hegemony, and hegemonic masculinity in particular. The proponents of hegemonic masculinity have borrowed from the relational theorization of gender in feminist analysis (see particularly Connell 1995) to articulate how a dominant form of masculinity becomes legitimized and naturalized, and thus invisible.

The third strand in theories of hegemonic masculinity involves an embracing of history within the analysis. By moving beyond either static notions of patriarchy or sex role theory, hegemonic masculinity theory advocates that masculinity is socially constituted in different ways and in different configurations, at different historical times and places. Again, this strand has been appropriated by advocates of the theory of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, Connell (1995) drew explicitly on the ideas of some influential historical analyses of masculinity, such as Phillips ([1987] 1996) and Roper and Tosh (1991).

The final strand is identified most clearly with the work of Connell and others who have embraced the theoretical language of hegemonic masculinity, particularly those who have studied gay

men and have worked on the development of queer theory. Specifically, any analysis of masculinity as a singular, autonomous social construction is entirely contradictory, given the previous three assertions. Plural *masculinities* are the most appropriate mode of analysis; these exist in complex power relations with each other, and with various constructions of femininity. Hence the nomenclature of “hegemonic masculinity” conceals the essence of Connell (1995): he argues that a hegemonic power relation actually implicates a *range* of relationally empowered masculinities, and suggests that we may distinguish, at the very least, what he terms hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities.

Thus it must be acknowledged that the term *hegemonic masculinity* has become a theoretical grab bag. Researchers have taken to it with the abandon that often comes with the enthusiasm for a useful new expression. This is not necessarily a lamentable situation: in a living language the meanings of words develop over time, sometimes even in contradictory ways, and this is true of a living theoretical language as well. Yet we would be remiss if we did not point out some of the shortcomings in the way some scholars have deployed the term and the idea of hegemonic masculinity.

First, and perhaps most regrettably, many have used the notion of hegemonic masculinity as if it were an autonomous theoretical development, thereby ignoring the broader feminist debates that gave rise to some of its central components. Further, the term *hegemonic masculinity* now often stands for an entire research tradition, one that emphasizes the plurality of masculinities. Yet the word *hegemonic* seems to suggest just the reverse: a monoculture of masculinity. The recognition of “hegemonic masculinity” as one of Connell’s four original categories is now frequently submerged as the term spreads beyond its close association with Connell’s own work. Scholars sometimes engage in a largely unrelational analysis of what was intended to be a highly relational concept.

Another criticism is that some scholars have used the notion of hegemonic masculinity in forms of analysis that display functionalist logic, as Campbell, Law, and Honeyfield (1999) argue. For example, Hanke (1992) describes a process by which the American media have redefined the hegemonic masculine position so as to rescue American men from the crisis of the old hegemonic order. Although few dispute that images of “new men” are prevalent in the media, one wonders whether those whose actions created these images were conscious of the urgent need to defend a threatened hegemony. The issue here is that Hanke never clearly identifies those engaged in disseminating hegemonic forms of masculinity, at least not in the manner of Gramsci’s classical theory of capitalist hegemony. The result is a tendency towards a functionalist teleology in explaining the preservation of male power. Also, the absence

of a theory of gender agency is accompanied by the lack of a theory of gender resistance, as Donaldson (1993) noted in his critique of a number of scholars who used hegemonic masculinity theory. Thus hegemonic masculinity remains an intractable monolith—a position that makes impossible the very formulation of a theory of hegemonic masculinity.

Despite the strange alchemy that has allowed the idea of hegemonic masculinity to subsume theoretical ideas from such a wide range of positions, Connell himself clearly attempts to move beyond the grab-bag character of the term in his 1995 work, in search of a more fully integrative theory of masculinities. Most important, he gives considerable recognition to recent analyses of the physical body in social theory. He argues that the individual subject, when viewed biographically, constructs (and is constructed by) gender both through differentially empowered relationships with others and through “body reflexive practices” in which the body’s physical attributes and activities become an agent in the gendering of the human subject. These suggestions by Connell are really an acknowledgment of wider theoretical developments in both notions of performativity, as in the work of Judith Butler (1993), and body theory, which overlap somewhat with Connell’s own long-term commitment to neo-Freudian ideas.

When elaborating on his earlier ideas, Connell reaches the edge of poststructuralism, particularly in his latest work, but he does not pursue further the path that his work seems to be following. Saco (1992) argues that the notion of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily incompatible with the insights of poststructuralist theory, which reflects a wider debate on the utility of the idea of hegemony in poststructuralist media analysis. Star (1999) recently argued that Connell’s “new directions” (Connell 1995) eventually may abandon the orthodox politics of gender in favor of an understanding of masculinities as involving the multiple positionality of gendered subjects, or may abandon the individual subject entirely by engaging with masculinities as representation or part of the representational discourse of gender. Either abandonment would imply a deeply poststructuralist project.

The broader issue, however, is that the scholarly discussion of masculinities perhaps has focused too closely on Connell’s work and on the theoretical window it provides on the sociology of gender and masculinity. As illuminating as that window has been, it is limited (like any window) in the angles of vision it can provide. Indeed, one of us has been involved in developing a dialogic approach to masculinity based on a distinction between “monologic masculinity”—a masculinity that speaks and acts with minimal acknowledgment of others, and maintains rigid distinctions between the acceptable performances of masculinity and of femininity—and “dialogic masculinity”—a masculinity that seeks to take others and

their words into account, and has a more open, more relational understanding of masculinity and femininity. This approach is developed by Peter et al. (2000): these scholars, on the basis of a study of the sustainable agriculture movement in Iowa, argue that all men in particular social conditions exhibit both monologic and dialogic tendencies, but that some men on the whole exhibit one more than the other. A distinctive feature of a dialogic approach to understanding masculinity is that it is explicitly normative. It holds that monologic masculinity is bad and that dialogic masculinity is good, and it seeks to understand the social conditions that might encourage the greater development of the latter.

Certainly other windows exist as well. The last thing that any scholar of masculinity (Connell included) would want is for the theory of hegemony masculinity itself to become a hegemonic concept.

Whatever the future course of the debate, it currently involves two broad bodies of theory. Hegemonic masculinity theory represents the continuous development of that body of ideas which first emerged as an adjunct to feminist theories of gender in the mid-1980s. Most analyses of masculinity still fall within this broad orthodoxy. Through the 1990s, however, issues of poststructural analysis not only have intrigued mainstream masculinity scholars like Connell (also see Craig 1992; Hanke 1992) but also have attracted a new body of masculinity scholars involved in feminist analysis, media studies, queer theory, and postcolonial theory (Boyd 1996; Edwards 1997; Jackson 1991; Perchuk and Posner 1995; Pfeil 1995; Segal 1990). As Mac an Ghail (1996) argues, it is too early to say whether this development represents a new synthesis, or whether the post-structuralist challenge will result in a splintering of approaches.

Studying Rural Masculinity

In view of the theory reviewed above, there can be no such thing as a singular object called “rural masculinity.” Rather, we should speak of the symbolic, discursive, or ideological constructions that we use to demarcate some things, some people, and some places as masculine rather than feminine. Just as recent debates about rurality have established that there can be no such thing as a singular object called “the rural” (Jones 1995; Murdoch and Pratt 1993, 1994; Philo 1992, 1993; Pratt 1996), we should recognize the existence of “rural masculinities.” No objective thing that could be called “rural masculinity” can be separated analytically from a parallel object called “urban masculinity.” Rather, we are interested here in the intersection of the rural and the masculine on a symbolic level.

To leave the matter there, however, is to leave it as a buzzing state of confusion, a swirling cloud of pesky signifiers. Thus we suggest a contrast between studies of *the masculine in the rural* and studies of *the rural in the masculine*—or, more concisely, between *the masculine rural* and *the rural masculine*. We are aware that by offering categor-

ical distinctions we run the risk of encouraging singular forms of thinking all over again, if we do not continually keep in mind the reifying power of all language. We therefore urge the reader to be mindful of this power.

By *the masculine in the rural*, we mean the various ways in which masculinity is constructed within what rural social scientists would recognize as rural spaces and sites (e.g., Brandth 1995; Stolen 1995). This distinction is not simple, particularly if we wish to take account of both the marked and the unmarked association of particular masculinities in rural space. For example, the farmer is commonly constructed as a "he," although women's labor is central in most agricultural production. Here masculinity is a marked category within rurality that promotes the invisibility of women. Alternatively, the masculine rural may be unmarked, as in the notion of good farming as the result of the hard-working, competitive individualist working alone by the sweat of the brow. Thus the construction of masculinity in rural space can both be marked and unmarked, visibly and invisibly masculine.

By *the rural in the masculine*, we mean the way in which notions of rurality help constitute notions of masculinity. For example, rural themes are used commonly in images of the "real man": the logger with his chain saw felling a giant tree; the Marlboro cowboy cantering over the plains on his trusty horse; the pioneer leading his wagon across the prairies and defending his family from the howling Indians; the hairy Iron John warrior rising from the swamps to lead modern men out of the crisis of their threatened masculinity; the soldier defending the green fields of the mother country (as has already been described by Woodward [1998]). In all these examples, the symbolic notions or discourses of rurality have "floated free" from the experience of individuals who inhabit rural space. Especially significant in the rural masculine is the way in which associations with rurality bring an air of the natural to images of masculinity, legitimating them as allegedly in touch with truths that are deeper than the merely social. The rural masculine therefore is highly significant in that it enables us to engage with masculinities that are situated in both rural and urban space. It provides rural social science with an opportunity to address gender issues as they apply well outside our traditional audience.

We can think of no better way to describe more concretely the distinction between the masculine rural and the rural masculine than by discussing how the six papers in this special issue engage this distinction. Nearly all the authors begin their analysis within either of these positions, but most then move towards some form of dialogue between the two. The imagery of the rural masculine, of course, must begin with the historic images of the masculine rural—with cowboys, farmers, and hairy warriors. In addition, the

imagery of the rural masculine has implications for the concrete practices of the masculine rural, by providing widely recognized cultural categories of appropriate masculinity. The masculine rural thus becomes an arena for the consumption of the imagery of the rural masculine.

The clearest exposition of the masculine rural is provided by Little and Jones, who describe how a new style of rural development policy, revolving around competitive (and highly performative) bidding processes by rural communities, has ended up giving preference to masculine modes of practice and networks. Although the masculinities mobilized in this bidding process are invisible to the participants (with some critical exceptions, namely the women marginalized by the process), they have real consequences for women attempting to formulate alternative ways of fostering rural development.

In contrast, Bell compellingly analyzes how discourses of rurality have been incorporated into popular cultural representations of masculinity and sexuality, and how alternative masculine identities (in this case, for one construction of gay masculinity) have used notions of rurality as a way of naturalizing masculine sexuality by association with nature, Arcadia, or simpler social relations. Bell offers an exposition of the tensions and ironies between the Hollywood stereotype of the “rustic sodomite” and the Arcadian aspirations of the “radical fairies” movement; he outlines the flexibility of the rural as a signifier of sexuality and masculinity. This discussion provides an excellent example of the rural masculine, but Bell does not stop there: he also provides a brief dialogue between these constructions of the rural masculine and the experience of the masculine rural—in this case the experiences of gay men living in rural areas.

These two articles respectively outline the most dedicated analysis of the masculine rural and the rural masculine. The other four papers tend to begin with one or other and to move into a dialogue between the two.

Campbell’s paper is theoretically close to that of Little and Jones. His analysis of rural pub drinking in New Zealand clearly demonstrates how masculine invisibility and hegemony can be closely related. By outlining two dynamics of pub drinking—“conversational cockfighting” and the “disciplines of drinking”—he details how the performance of drinking naturalizes men’s behavior and renders invisible to the participants the very specific forms of masculinity being enacted. Although this analysis belongs primarily to the masculine rural framework, one aspect of pub drinking—the way in which issues of “localness” and “local history” legitimize this form of masculinity—suggests how the rural masculine is mobilized discursively by this group of men.

Two other papers strike an intriguing balance between the masculine rural and the rural masculine. Woodward's analysis of military training in rural Britain poses an array of questions about the real and imagined qualities of the rural in training new recruits. Although today's armed conflicts occur overwhelmingly in cities, the British Army persists in training its soldiers in rugged rural terrain. Woodward subtly analyzes the processes by which a particular model of the masculine rural—the warrior hero—is constructed during the training process. In this way, she details how notions of masculinity are constantly challenged, redefined, and reaffirmed through the embodied experience of male soldiers interacting with a symbolic and real rural environment. One notable observation is the way in which soldiers and the military mobilize conceptions of masculinity and the social experience of rural environments (as rugged, tough, challenging, and dangerous) in the formation of the warrior hero. In this formation, the masculine rural and the rural masculine clearly are intertwined closely.

Kimmel and Ferber pursue a similar task by examining how masculinity and rurality have been constructed symbolically (often by rural men) in the right-wing militia movement. Although this movement incorporates men from both urban and rural backgrounds, the situation of militia activities in rural spaces is important for understanding the ideological project of militia groups. In an ironic mirror image of the British military as described by Woodward, the right-wing militias of the United States also actively mobilize specific sentiments about both masculinity and rurality. Instead of the warrior hero, the militia presents a masculine rural image of virtuous, alienated white males, gathering in rural areas to resist the depredations of urban-based minorities and liberals, and the activities of urban-oriented government. A purported assault on the integrity of white masculinity is the common cause of the militias; their situation in rural areas and their mobilization of a mythologized rural history of America make this a compelling case study of the political power of masculinities.

Finally, alongside Bell in the exposition of poststructuralist methods of analysis, Liepins presents a useful exemplar showing how rural social scientists might use Foucauldian discourse analysis. After outlining the methods by which media might be analyzed as a site in which meanings about masculinity are circulated, she examines an array of rurally based media in New Zealand and Australia. Two narratives of masculinity emerge from this analysis: "tough men" and "powerful leaders." Both take on the status of unquestioned truths about the nature of gender in rural Australia and New Zealand. The circulation of these ideas not only obscures the historical roots of these notions of masculinity but also stifles possible resistance or alternative readings of gender (although without precluding all resistance). This style of analysis moves comfortably,

via discourse analysis, across our two categories, the masculine rural and the rural masculine.

Let there be more moving across categories. Through this review we have attempted to map out the continuum of possibilities for researchers interested in the relationship between masculinity and the rural. Although we find the distinction between the masculine rural and the rural masculine useful (at the very least for initiating research), these papers present a rich array of theoretical insights and data that go well beyond such broad categories. They should be commended for doing so.

Conclusion

Before directing the reader to engage with these papers in all their detail, we wish to make a few concluding comments about the significance of this research area for the rural social sciences. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, research into masculinity tended to bifurcate into critical or neoconservative forms. We have no patience with the latter. This special issue, the first to be devoted to rural masculinities by any social science journal, should be viewed as a strong statement of support for the critical analysis of masculinities as sources of gendered power in rural society and as part of a wider relational view of gender. Therefore this issue does not represent an alternative paradigm to the feminist critique of rural social relations. Rather, it is an adjunct. Carolyn Sachs (1983) argued that women had become “invisible farmers.” Now we need to see men as equally constructed social subjects. Visible farmers were always men, but they were never visible *as* men. Much of the sociological analysis of farmers as farmers actually should have concerned the various masculinities enacted by some farmers.

By adopting a critical approach to masculinities, we wish to suggest two challenges that this kind of research presents for the rural social sciences. First, we need to understand how sociological analysis of masculinity can lead to social change. We contribute to this task by rendering visible rural masculinities, which help to constitute social relations in both the country and the city. We must encourage analysis that makes masculinities visible to men, who have most commonly embodied masculinity but often without recognizing it and the privileges it entails, and to women, who have been most commonly disadvantaged by those privileges. One characteristic of power is the way in which it becomes natural, normal, unquestioned, and unacknowledged—in other words, invisible. And one of our tasks as rural social scientists is to render visible that which is so unquestioned as to be accepted as natural, normal, and therefore unchallengeable.

Therefore we hope to contribute to the conversation on rural power relations between men and women, and between men and men. A great body of work in the rural social sciences has already

established women's disempowered position in rural society. To fully understand and change this situation, however, we must comprehend how men are differentially empowered as much as how women are differentially disempowered; these are two sides of the same coin.

One goal of this special issue, then, is to provide a more sharply focused critique of power in society and, more specifically, how social power is associated with the rural. Certainly we recognize that there is a difference between a sharper critical focus and achieving concrete change. Thus, although we do not want to claim too much for the social significance of the work represented here, the one seems a prerequisite for the other.

We also wish to offer a challenge to the field of analysis which rural social scientists believe to be our home terrain. All of us, as rural social scientists, are comfortable with research that engages directly with the inhabitants of rural spaces and sites. The papers offered here, however, open up some exciting possibilities for the rural social sciences of the future. In regard to the distinction we present here between the masculine rural and the rural masculine, we instinctively feel more comfortable, as rural social scientists, with the masculine rural, safely embedded as it is in "real" rural life.

The broader development of masculinity (and gender) theory challenges the drawing of such a disciplinary boundary. What we have described here as the rural masculine severely disrupts many of our preconceived notions about the natural terrain of inquiry for the rural social sciences. Even in this special issue, not one contributor was able to remain completely in the rural masculine. With the acknowledgment that symbolic or discursive notions of rurality now play a part in the construction of wider gender identities than those possessed by rural folk, a window of opportunity has opened for rural social scientists to begin addressing the wider field of gender analysis. The gay urbanites discussed by Bell, the alienated rust belt dwellers portrayed in Kimmel and Ferber, and Woodward's urban army recruits are not our usual subjects for analysis. Yet, as demonstrated here, their masculinity is bound intimately to notions of rurality.

Even as this window has opened here for the wider study of masculinity by specialists in things rural, a similar window exists for other research areas such as media studies and the sociology of culture. This does not represent an abandonment of our traditional research focus; as this special issue demonstrates, even the most poststructuralist contributions published here have profited from a dialogue between the rural masculine and the masculine rural. We can never separate the two entirely: even rural folk have seen *Deliverance*, Marlboro ads, and army training manuals. By understanding how each views the other, we can learn much about the social

life of rural masculine images and about the social life of masculine rural spaces.

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