

Rural Support Networks in the UK and Canada: The Influence of the Patrilineal Culture of Family Farming

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Abstract: Rural support organisations have emerged since agricultural restructuring of the 1980s. The paper draws on research from the UK and Canada to suggest that the support in both countries is derived from a patrilineal culture that still dominates family farming. The paper begins by outlining a conceptual basis for arguing that such a culture can be understood as comprising of male and female relational gender identities capable of explaining farm relationships, farm survival and adjustment strategies and community engagement. These components, it is argued, are facets of the patrilineal farming culture which must be understood if its impacts on all its members are to be appropriately comprehended and supported.



The paper has two key aims, therefore. Firstly it suggests that a more nuanced understanding of farming 'culture' which is persistently patrilineal in nature is now required which is capable of addressing the realities of farming individuals' lives as they perceive them. The conceptualisation of such a culture is informed by drawing on insights from gender theory, agricultural geography and rural studies.

This conceptual discussion provides the context for the paper's second aim which is to demonstrate how rural support in both the UK and Canada is derived 'from' and is influenced by such a patrilineal culture. Findings are presented identifying five key themes from this conceptualization which influence the support of such organisations. Thus, it is suggested, that the nature of rural support can be better understood and the appropriateness of the support interrogated when such conceptualization is taken on board.

Introduction

The paper is structured to initially provide conceptual direction to the approach to the patrilineal culture of family farming being taken in the paper. The word 'patrilineal' is defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* as 'relating to, or based on relationship to the father or descent through the male line'. Such a patrilineal culture will be shown to provide the foundations of farm survival, comprising relational, generational gender identities of farming individuals. It is suggested that to date the importance of this underpinning to the very existence, experiences and survival of family farming has lacked acknowledgment. A wider conceptualisation of farm culture is now required, therefore, which is epistemologically focussed by gender theory and moves beyond the farm gate. Such theorisation is now developed in the first part of the paper by providing an understanding of the impact of the meshing of gender identities, the farm business and experiences of changing rural communities. Such understanding will provide the contextualisation for the influence of the culture on rural support that is discussed by drawing on the findings later in the paper. Only when such theorisation has occurred, it is suggested, can the cultural influence of patrilineal family farming on rural support in the UK and Canada since the 1980s be understood. Thus the findings provide clear evidence of the persistence and stubbornness of patrilineal farm culture in the UK and Canada through its influence on the support provided to farming individuals.

The context to the emergence, structure and focus of rural support organisations from the 1980s onwards is provided in the second section of the paper. This is followed by a brief methodological outline of the research conducted with support organisations in the UK and Canada. The argument that rural support is derived from patrilineal farm culture is then developed by drawing on the findings. Here five key themes which influence rural support provision in the UK and Canada will be shown and discussed. Such discussion enables the influence of the culture on rural support to be highlighted. The appropriateness and implications of such support are interrogated throughout. Thus conclusions and research directions are provided in the final section.

Conceptualizing the Patrilineal Culture of Family Farming

Patrilineal Farming Culture: Agricultural gender identities

It is suggested here that farm culture is underpinned by patrilineal, relational gender identities whose construction, enactment and maintenance are becoming ever more

difficult to retain. Maintenance of such a culture also requires the compliance of the majority of the extended kinship that comprises the farm family in order for the farm/culture to be perpetuated through the male line which remains the norm. Theoretical direction is derived from rural studies and approaches to gender theory from across the social sciences. This assists expansion on understanding the 'way of life' developed previously by the author (see Price and Evans, 2009).

Since the 1980s the economic value of women's gendered work roles within the social character of the family farm has been acknowledged, but with limited critical examination of **why** women take on such roles within relations of gender (Gasson, 1992). However, from a critical realist gender perspective women have often been shown to be unaware of the impact relations of capital and patterns of patriarchy in different places and occupations have on their daily lives (Harroway, 1991; Katz, 1994). Whatmore (1991) influenced by political economy perspectives usefully explained in more detail how the reproductive and productive gender relationships of family farming were integrated in a 'domestic political economy' model. Such work usefully demonstrated the stubbornness of the social structures of family farming. Here farming women were shown to contribute unpaid work to the farm/culture both inside and outside the farm door in order that the family could avoid being subsumed within capitalism as agricultural restructured. (see Shortall, 2002, Silvasti, 2003 and Alston, 2006 as Northern Irish, Finnish and Australian examples). Questions arise, however, as to 'how' such gender relations of coping with capitalist agriculture are produced and maintained within the heterosexual 'gender regime' required by the patrilineal culture (Little, 2003). Here the work of Connell (2002) is useful in considering the relational nature of farming gender identities through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity (Brandth, 1995; Morris and Evans, 2001). Thus dominant norms are shown to exist where the status of farm women complements rather than challenges the status of farming men. Such insights can assist conceptualisation of the position of farming men and women around the dominant gender coding of farmer/helper that pervades the culture across and within generations (Price and Evans, 2005). Here, from birth, men are usually socialised as a farmer's 'son' and have the opportunity to inherit and learn the skills of farming (Brandth, 2002). Across the developed world daughters have been shown to learn, predominantly, to be supporters of farming men as they move through the life-cycle of 'farmer's son', 'boss farmer' and 'retired farmer' (see Heather *et al.* 2005; Price; 2010a; Scott, 1996 for Canadian, UK and US insights).

Clearly researchers advocating post-structural approaches to understanding identities of farming individuals resist the primacy given here to the social structures of family farming. Diverse identities and subjective performance clearly exist in any social setting (Butler, 1990). Authors such as O'Hara in Ireland (1998) and Bennett in the UK (2005) reinforce the power and agency of farm women within circumscribed arenas of patriarchy. However, such power can be said to exist within the parameters of the patrilineal culture and is, therefore, considered to be limited. What is necessary, however, in understanding the complexity and breadth of the culture is conceptualization capable of engaging at a range of spatial scales. Clearly farm individuals are situated within a global agri-economic policy context which requires social relations of production. The experiences of such individuals are also nested, however, within the micro, gendered emotional geographies of the farm. Ideas of hereditary belonging and attachment to land are clearly important to farm men and supported by women. It is suggested, therefore, that an overall pattern exists where individuals experience and perpetuate the farm culture *from* the life-stage position of their relational farming gender identity which can be summarised by gender as farmer/helper.

To date, feminist-informed work which includes men, however, is limited (see Butz and Berg, 2002 Price, 2010a). Clearly, patriarchy can be said to exist when one seeks it out in agri-culture. To date a focus on men's farming identities has largely focussed on issues of 'masculinity' and challenges to breaking away from traditional farming (Ni Laoire, 2005). However, whilst farming culture may indeed be patriarchal, a starting point, incorporating men into research frames is necessary in order to understand the pervasiveness of the culture and therefore, as will be seen, its influence on farming support. This does not diminish the reality that despite changes in inheritance laws in countries such as Norway, it is still predominantly men who inherit, own and retain decision making on family farms (Almas and Haugen, 1991). Neither does such incorporation negate the fact that, internationally, women are often suppressing their legal and monetary rights and subsidising patrilineal farm survival (see Gasson and Errington, 1993; Price, 2006). The focus of this paper, however, is on developing theorisation capable of understanding the key features of the culture and thus its influence on rural support. Hence, ultimately, the damaging nature of the culture on farming men and the pressure of continued adherences to 'keeping the name on the land', might potentially illicit a process of self-questioning. Such 'bottom-up' questioning of patriarchy is likely to be more successful than that imposed externally.

Research is beginning to demonstrate, for example, the impact the responsibility of maintaining a farming gender identity and the farm itself has on men (see Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005 and Price, 2010b as US and UK examples). Here, through their gender identity as farmermen it is beginning to be acknowledged how repeated actions of mind and body may lead to men believing a farmer is 'who' they are. For men, as farmer, engage with animals and nature in a spatial arena where legacy, culture, belonging, home and work are intertwined. The continued reinforcement of such an identity can be catastrophic when the culture in which it is embedded is in jeopardy (Caralan, 2008; Harrison, 2000). Understanding of the relational, generational, gender identities which underpin the patrilineal culture must now include men, therefore, in order to comprehend the influence of the culture on rural support provision.

Representational work informed by a post-modern focus on 'texts' is also useful in considering the ways 'views' of the farmer/helper gender coding comes to dominate the culture, reinforcing its patrilineality. Representations of men in media, such as tractor advertisements (Brandth, 1995), tend to reinforce entitlement to and attachment with the land with women usually portrayed as appendant 'helper' (Price and Evans, 2005). Depictions of the 'farmer' as independent and stoical, able to tame nature through technological knowledge developed across generations have been shown to be wider spread (Liepin, 1996; Saugeres, 2002). Such depictions potentially diminish challenges to men's own internationalisation of farming gender identity. For, if men have a *vision* of their gender identity linked to their generational positioning as a farming man which is culturally constructed and represented, that they 'belong' to the land and this is threatened so, potentially, are they. It is from such fears that rural support will be shown to derive.

Patrilineal Farming Culture : The Family Farm: Business and Survival

Now that the farmer/helper dominant gender coding has been established insights from Agricultural Geography will be drawn on to highlight their importance in farm business and survival strategies. The political economy perspective became dominant, internationally, from the 1980s onwards to explain agrarian change and its uneven development within the confines of wider economic, state processes (Ilbery, 1998). The approach was subsequently modified, however, to include investigation of the decisions of the 'business holder' in relation to changing, global agricultural reform. Here some acknowledgment of the social relations of the farm household to such development was evident (Munton *et al.*, 1992). However, as over-production was

curtailed farmers, through supporting subsidies, were increasingly directed to more environmentally sensitive approaches to agriculture (Potter, 1988; Wilson, 1997). Such restructuring raised debates on the extent to which agricultural was becoming 'post productivist' or 'multi-functional' (Evans *et al.*, 2002; ; Wilson, 2001; 2008).

The key point here is that approaches to human agency within changing market conditions have largely been confined to a focus on the male 'farmer' . This is mainly as a result of the prevalence of men's appearance in official statistics as business-holder. Such statistics continue to exclude many farming women; sons and retired farmers (see Lobley and Potter, 2004 as an example). Therefore their influence and contributions to farm survival and decisions has lacked acknowledgement (Potter and Tilzey, 2005; Price and Evans, 2006). As has already been shown without the majority of farming men and women 'signing up' to the patrilineal culture and enacting relational, generational gender identities there would often be no farm. The platform such family arrangements also provide for farm agri-economic decisions continues to be underestimated, however. Again, therefore, this has implications for rural support provision if individuals will only speak to those they believe understand the often unspoken nature of this culture and that, ultimately, economic decisions are in fact family decisions. Farm-adjustment, diversification strategies continue to elicit interest for agricultural geographers (Evans, 2009; Ilbery, 1991). However, an understanding of motives for adopting strategies which are productivist, post-productivist or multifunctional can only be partial unless the patrilineal influences on such decision-making are also understood. For example, the adoption of 'holding strategies' when no successor exists is often accepted by rural support providers as is the impact of the existence of sons/inheritors on decisions to expand, constrict or sell the farm. Such cultural tradition will be shown to form the norms from where rural support is derived

Debates on the extent to which global farming has become more culturally aware, however, has largely coagulated around debates on diversification, sustainability (Robinson, 2003) and food quality (Morris and Young, 2000) rather than its patrilineal cultural underpinning. Farming individuals, for example, may become increasingly interested in agri-environmentalism, running farm shops or keeping rare breeds (Yarwood and Evans, 1998). However, family farms operate in an arena where its members usually attempt to be productivist, to keep the farm going and make it pay (see Price and Evans, 2009) There are other reasons, however, coalescing around a sense of belonging, tradition, history and autonomy, it is suggested, that can supersede economic imperatives. Clearly, farming women perform diverse roles and influence

agricultural practices. Women have also been shown to take strategic decisions based on the overall motives of the farm culture (Farmar-Bowers, 2010). For example, as Alston (2006) outlines, during the 2006 Australian drought women were prepared to work away from the farm in order to supplement it economically and assist its patrilineal survival. Whatmore (1991) and Ashton (1991) have highlighted how important farming women are to the farming enterprise. However, unpaid work by *all* family farm members is often overlooked in explaining farm adjustment strategies (Lobley and Potter, 2004). Such pluriactive farming work roles of women has been acknowledged (see Evans and Ilbery, 1996). However, women such as those Heather *et. al* (2005) spoke to in Canada are only too well aware they are often risking their own well-being endeavouring to keep men on the land. So worried are these women about the potential loss of men's autonomy and identity if they have to leave farming that they soak up much male stress. Farming men will be shown to perceive the stigma of admitting to needing support within such a patrilineal culture so intensely that support organizations continue to accept the ever-increasing role of women as the caretakers of the male identity and naturalise the ever-greater burdens of work just to keep the farm/men in existence. This is bound to create a perilous situation.

Women, therefore, are clearly crucial to patrilineal farm survival including, as Gasson and Errington (1993) demonstrated in their important work, farming daughters accepting pay-offs or 'dowries' on marriage in place of being farm successors. The gendered epistemological approach to such an all-encompassing gendered-culture being developed here is capable of highlighting the norm of women's compliance with patrilineal. It can also now extend understanding of how farming sons are often having to wait longer than ever to become farm partners as fear of divorce and farm break up worries the older generations (Price and Evans, 2006). Such unseen family dynamics form the foundations of family farm enterprises and thus survival. Such a situation will be shown to be recognised by the rural support sector that emerged from the 1980s onwards as enabling farm patrilineal farm survival became harder than ever.

Patrilineal Farming Culture: The 'Cultural Turn' and the Rural Community

Rural support in both countries will be shown to have emerged 'from' the culture of farming which prides itself on its stoicism and independence. However, such a culture is also, increasingly, felt to be under threat as rural communities continue to change. Thus the recent trend for mainstreaming of such support into organisations with little knowledge or interest in such a farming culture will be shown to raise issues. Farm

individuals have been shown to predominantly adhere to a gender regime that is linked with perceptions of the 'right' to stay on the land, preferably farming, despite economic and social rural change (see Price and Evans, 2009). This clearly marginalises farming individuals as an agrarian ideal and moral order no longer dominates rural communities (see Bryant and Joseph, 2001; Bunce, 1994; Caldwell 1991; Hughes, 1997; Newby, 1980; Troughton, 1997; 1999). Farm individuals can also be said to have been marginalised within Rural Studies which since the review article of Philo (1992) has, understandably, wished to reveal rural 'others'. Dominated by post-modern theorisation such a 'cultural turn' has focused on revealing the previously hidden encounters of everyday spaces from a variety of subject positions such as race, disability, sexuality.. Thus accounts of 'the rural' and 'rurality' increasingly claim to redress the previous foci on mainstream interconnections between culture and rurality 'through the lens of typical white, male, middle-class narratives' of which farming was seen to comprise (Philio, 1992, p. 200). Here images of a pastoral idyll constructed since rapid rural to urban migration of the nineteenth century have been drawn on to demonstrate how dominant rural values served to marginalise the voices of 'other rurals' and issues not conforming to an idealised and imagined idea of the countryside (Bunce, 1994; Short, 1991; Williams, 1973). Usefully, issues such as rural poverty, drug and alcohol abuse were brought into view (Cloke and Milbourne, 1992). However, as counter-urbanization increased from the 1990s onwards, the image of the rural as a simpler way of life with a close-knit community was considered important in the *vision* of the countryside urban dwellers were sold (Halfacree, 1994). The realities of the farming culture, however, are not always part of the sanitised image re/created in 'moving to the country'. Thus farm culture within rural communities is felt by its adherents to be under threat.

Limited research from feminist perspectives has considered the experiences of women in rural communities who do not fit the image of a 'rural idyll' (Little and Austin, 1996; Hughes, 1997). Other work has considered that gender studies had 'an initial focus on farm women and their role in agriculture' thus validating their continued absence from culturally-infused approaches' (Little, 2002, p.2). However, there are clearly patterns of female behaviour with the patrilineal culture that tend to support maintaining the farm for male inheritance. It is from this reality that rural support derived. Enacting gender identities in the rural community is clearly part of a continuum of relational farming gender identities, radiating out from the nucleus of the farm family. Such identities cannot be left at the farm gate. If they are, there is a danger of pressure building up

within the family. Rural Studies have struggled to accommodate the post-modern paradigm of the encounters of everyday spaces as they are structured by external capitalist forces (Murdoch and Pratt, 1993). Thus developing a broader conceptualisation of farm culture which extends into rural communities provides an exciting opportunity to bring together these scales of enquiry as the cultural prerequisite of farm/cultural survival clashes with the reality of external agri-economic policies and rural demographic change (see Woods, 2005).

Such clashes extend *into* the rural community. If farm individuals still feel that rural land is for 'productivist' activity when for most rural residents and visitors it is now a commodified place of conservation and leisure then conflict has been shown to ensue (Robinson, 1990; Woods 2003). Often such conflict erupts through planning processes (Curry, 1994; Gallent *et al.*, 2008). Recent crises such as B.S.E. and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) (Scott, *et al.*, 2004) have served only to increase farming's sense of its own unpopularity as portrayed in the popular media, not helped by marches organised by *The Countryside Alliance* in favour of hunting with foxes (Brockes, 2002; Rae, 2002). Rural support organizations have developed, independently, because staying on the land often now literally means staying, isolated, on the farm. The strain on the family of such retreat from the rural community and retrenchment within the family is increasing. Thus having culturally sympathetic individuals to speak with who know and accept what it is like to grow up, socialize, live and die in the countryside as a *farm* individual within the rural support sector will be shown to be important. However, such normalisation also increases the strain on familial relationships. Ultimately rural support will be influenced by fear that when farming men, in particular, find the places to enact their male, farming identity constricted and marginalised so firm is this identity, so attached is it to the *place* of farming that life without it is at risk of becoming unimaginable. The spectre of farming, male suicide, therefore, will be shown to pervade the provision of rural support in both the UK and Canada (Hawton *et al.* 1998; Sturgeon and Morrissette, 2010).

Summary

The conceptual discussion provided here has highlighted the complicated nature of patrilineal farm culture which is nested within the micro geographies of the relational, generational gender identities of everyday life. However the culture is also situated within global agri-economics affecting farm survival and the nature of engagement with changing communities. The influence of such norms on the provision of rural support

has been raised, therefore, and will be discussed in more depth in section four. First, the research's methodological approach is briefly outlined.

Methodological Approach

The research on which this paper is based was conducted from 2008-2009 and had four objectives: to create a typology of rural support organizations in the UK and Canada; to investigate funding mechanisms; to analyse the organizations promotional material in order identify dominant themes and to assess the attitudes of service providers to rural support provision (Price and Bell 2008; 2009). The research took a grounded theory approach where 'emergent' theories of social action were identified through the analysis of emerging categories and the relationships between them (Charmaz, 2004; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This ontological approach was suitable for such an under-researched topic and meant that key themes could evolve through an iterative process where the researcher analyses the data at each stage and selects a further sample in order to refine emerging features (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

The research went through four methodological phases. **Firstly** it began by implementing a desk top study to aid the identification of support organizations. Here website searches and internet trawls of promotional materials and media advertisements were undertaken. A selection of organizations in each country was also contacted by email or telephone in order to identify further organizations where no such material was identified in a particular county/province using the snowballing technique. Promotional materials were downloaded and the process of identifying organizational types from the eighty identified, forty in each country were undertaken.

The **second stage** of the research involved undertaking a content analysis of the promotional material identified in stage one. This involved considering key words, the use of graphics, photographs and colour in order to build up a picture of the dominant messages embedded in the materials (Robson, 2002). Here Burgess's (1990) 'circuit of culture' was drawn on in considering that such texts would contain messages related to a) what kinds of problems the organizations identified with and b) how they responded to such issues. Or what Tonkiss (2000) describes as 'systems of social meaning' embedded in texts which can be interpreted for their likely impact on social action. It was at this stage that remarkable similarities were noted in the dominant

themes embedded in the promotional materials of organisations in both countries. The five key themes which emerged as influencing support provision were:

- 1) The necessity to provide 'peer' support to farming individuals from within the 'way of life'
- 2) The extent to which an awareness of male farm suicide focused support
- 3) An awareness that farming men, in particular, feel a stigma in admitting to needing support
- 4) An acceptance that farming women act as emotional caretakers within the farming family
- 5) An acknowledgement that external pressures i.e. weather, economics are beyond the control of the farming individuals, threaten farm survival and the right to remain on the land

The **third** stage of the methodology involved selecting ten representatives from a selection of organizations in each country. Their leaders were interviewed via telephone or in person and each of the above themes was discussed and verified with them. This process confirmed, strikingly, the importance and influence of these five themes to the organizations in both countries. As Wittgenstein argued in 1955 language provides limits to worlds of 'knowing'. It became clear, therefore, that the organisations are responding to a farming cultural frame of reference that can only be comprehended from within a farming world-view. For example, the meaning attributed to a farming 'way of life' equated to acceptance of patrilineal, farming culture as conceptualised in *section one*. This collision of understanding, where the 'unsaid' is as important as the 'said' (Hoffman, 1989) would clearly not exist in organisations were its members not derived from the patrilineal culture (see Hoffman, 1989 for the importance of language in understanding cultures).

The **final** methodological stage involved an **on-line survey**. Here the five themes were investigated with organisations in both countries in greater breadth and depth. Fifty-nine organizations responded, with approximately half being from each country. The survey data reinforced how important the features of the patrilineal farming culture are to the organizations, to the selection of volunteers and employees as well as to the

nature of support provided. The inductive methodological approach, as above, was highly successful.

Following a brief contextualization of the emergence of the rural support sector in the UK and Canada, as identified in the research conducted, the five themes identified here which map onto the conceptualization developed in section one will be presented. This will enable the similarities found in the influence of farming culture on rural support in the UK and Canada to be highlighted. Interview respondents are attributed to an organization, but remain anonymous.

The Context to the Emergence of Rural Support organizations in the UK and Canada

Particular similarities in the patrilineal culture of family farming have been noted in both the UK and Canada (Heather *et.al*; 2005; Leckie, 1993; Price and Evans, 2009). Also, despite a dearth of statistical evidence, since the 1980s researchers in both countries were noting issues with male 'well-being' and the extent to which farming men were taking their own lives (Bunting and Kelly, 1998; Hawton *et. al*, 1998; 1999 for UK and Barnes and Blevens, 1992; Peron and Strohmenger, 1985; Ramsey and Smit, 2002 for Canada). Such concerns been noted in Australia (Slee, 1988) and New Zealand (Joseph and Chalmers, 1995). The growth in organizations run volunteers not aligned to mainstream or 'official' mental health or support organizations during the 1980s and their subsequent demise in the twenty first century have also been noted in both countries.

Rural support organizations emerged in the UK and Canada from the 1980s onwards, therefore, largely as a result of disruption caused by agri-economic restructuring, disasters such as B.S.E. and changing rural relations as outlined previously. In particular, under reform of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the North American Free Trade agreement farm incomes dropped substantially from the 1990s onwards (DEFRA, 2003; Parson, 1999; Robinson, 2003). Perhaps what is not so familiar, however, is an awareness of how these changes influenced similar types of rural support to emerge from within the rural communities of the UK and Canada. In both countries, rapid economic and social restructuring was occurring with organizations providing support predominantly focussed on a growing awareness of male farming suicide as family farms struggled to survive. In both countries organizations evolved at three levels. In the UK National networks such as the *Rural*

Stress Information Network (RSIN) grew alongside existing coverage already being provided by the longstanding organizations such as The *Farm Crisis Network* (FCN) and the *Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution* (RABI). Regional networks such as the *West Midland Rural Support Network* were instigated and individual groups such as the *Powys Rural Outreach Project* (PROP) mushroomed. In Canada a similar picture emerged with the Saskatchewan *Farm Stress Line* providing a model for provincial-wide development, along with provincial-specific organizations such as *The Alberta Stress Line* and one-off organizations such as *Prince Edward Island – Farm Counselling Programme*. A common feature of organizations was the feeling that existing mainstream organizations could not deal with the specific features of a farming culture under threat from change beyond its members' control. Further, these new organizations, mostly comprising of individuals from the farming culture itself, appeared to reify its composition of patrilineal socialization, inheritance and history believing that it had a right to survive. It can be suggested, therefore, that the underlying rationale for the majority of organizations springing up in both the UK and Canada since the 1980s was to provide support for this culture rather than to question it.

Academic work on the topic of rural support organisations is extremely limited. Useful studies have focussed on the issues of 'stress/distress' as psychological/physiological concepts, rather than considering the *raison d'être* of organizations themselves. Here work by Booth and Lloyd (2000), Monk and Thorogood (1997) in the UK, Melberg (2003) in Norway, Jacob *et al.* (1997) in the US and Gerrard *et al.* (2004) in Canada provides useful examples. Other medically informed work has explored 'stress' as a consequence of crises such as B.S.E. or Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) (see Eisner *et al.*, 1999; Ortega *et al.* 1994; Peck *et al.*, 2002; Scott *et al.*, 2004). Examples, even here, of sociological work, however, are rare (see Pearlin, 1989 as a useful exception). Rural support organizations such as *Buckingham Rural Stress Group* in the UK (Campbell, 2001) and *The Saskatchewan Farm Stress Line* in Canada (Imhoff, 2003) commissioned reports on how best to deal with 'stress' in their locales. Rural Stress Action Plans were developed in England and Wales during the 1990s (Shaw, 2001). However, research on organizational structure, funding and philosophical underpinning is limited.

As agricultural crises have receded so, it appears, has funding of rural support organizations from the UK and Canadian government at national, regional/provincial and local levels. Thus it appears that politicians are expecting rural support services to be increasingly provided by 'mainstream', well-established groups and mental health

charities such as *The Samaritans* and *Citizens Advice Bureaus* in the UK and the *Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA)* in Canada. It is likely that such mainstreaming will continue in the future as long-organizations struggle to survive due to a lack of funding. It is to examples of the ways in which the patrilineal farming culture influences support, as conceptualized in section one, that the paper now turns.

Research Findings

Rural Support Providers and Necessity of Providing 'Peer Support' From Within the Farming Culture

The argument that the culture of family farming in the UK and Canada remains patrilineal and this influences rural support provision is now developed further by drawing on the research findings. In both countries it is clear that organizations are aware that in order for them to respond to the perceived needs of farming families that they must provide paid staff and volunteers from within the patrilineal culture of farming. Organizations appear to acknowledge and respond to farming men's dominant identity as 'farmer', with them usually having been brought up as farmer's sons. Gray (1996) has shown that farming men often take on the inherited role as guardian of the past, present and future story of the family farm. The fulfilment of this farming identity generates an emotional attachment to the land, of knowing little else and being responsible for its survival. The e-survey indicates that 72% of all support provided by rural support organizations is to farming men aged between 41 and 70, but the organizations recorded a response of zero when asked if they thought farming individuals would 'actively seek help from a mental health organization'. Clearly, therefore, organizations are aware that support must be provided from within the farming culture for it to be accessed. When surveyed on whether they thought farming individuals a 'difficult to reach group', 95% of respondents thought that they were.

The findings highlight that farming men often believe that they should maintain the independence and stoicism attributed to the culture and that they can only talk to people sympathetic to and coming from such a way of life. In some ways this may be inhibiting farming men seeking specialised help from mental-health organizations or getting a wider perspective on the possibilities of leaving the land. Amongst the respondents 60% felt that the greatest barrier to farming individuals seeking help was this being viewed as 'a sign of weakness'. Support organisations clearly support such a culture as an interviewee from the *Saskatchewan Farm Stress Line* indicates:

'farmers (men) will only talk to those from farming – they feel they know what they're talking about and will understand the pressures they are facing it all goes unexplained you support people often without referring to feelings sometimes they talk about them, but usually not- it's enough that they are just talking to someone this might be the first time that they've admitted to anyone that they're struggling and facing problems'.

(Interview, 2009)

The promotional material of the UK *Farm Crisis Network* (FCN) also states 'we have volunteers with an understanding of farming' and notes, 'for many farming is more than just a job. FCN also notes 'it's a lifestyle; the farm is their (mens) home as well as their work and often their identity too' (FCN, 2009). The implications of continually supporting this identity are unclear. However, if farming individuals will talk only to those who support a sense of attachment and belonging to the land and this is ever-more difficult to maintain, it is not difficult to see that this could be problematic if farm survival is in jeopardy.

Rural Support Providers and Dominant Focus on Farming Men and Suicide

The second theme to emerge from the research is that rural support organizations clearly see their primary focus as being to support farming men. High rates of male suicide amongst farming men over fifty have been noted in both countries. This means that for support organisations all other issues, such as depression amongst farming women, are eclipsed by this worrying, visible, trend. Indeed organizations in both countries can be said to have been instigated from an awareness of headline suicide figures amongst farming men. Organizations in Canada such as the *Manitoba Farm and Stress Line* are most graphic in portraying this feature of this theme, having produced a poster, leaflet and fridge-magnet.

Figure One Promotional leaflet, brochure and fridge magnet - Manitoba Suicide and Stress Line



As an interview with a representative from the *Farm Crisis Network* in the UK confirms, organizations are aware of wider issues such as how the demise of farm-workers is increasing work-burdens and isolation for farming men. However, such organizations feel that they have to respond to where the most obvious need is. Tragically this is seen as responding to the issue of male farming suicide. As Price and Evans (2009) have noted, farming men often claim that they would rather 'die' than leave the land. This is a reality that the organizations are clearly compelled to address, but they also appear to be accepting of it. Thus a norm of male farming suicide is prominent in approaches to rural support. It is interesting to note, however, that during the course of the research it emerged that a *Suicide and Depression Helpline* in Cork and Kerry in the Republic of Ireland was unsuccessful until it was rebranded as the *Farm and Rural Stress helpline* and started to receive calls either from or about farming men. This confirms that fears surrounding male, farming suicide are embedded in the organizations promotional material along with the perception that support will be accessed only by men when it is seen to be specifically 'farming' and from those sympathetic to its patrilineal culture.

Rural Support Providers - Farming way of life and The Stigma of Farming Men Seeking Help

Amongst the Canadian e-survey responses, 54% cited the 'stigma' of being seen to seek help as the key barrier to potential service users actually accessing support. A video produced by the UK-based *Rural Stress Information Network (RSIN)* called *Help at Hand*, demonstrates how veterinary surgeons have been trained to recognise when they can encourage farming men to seek help – so great is the stigma of admitting to

being 'stressed' or needing help. As *The Institute of Rural Health* in the UK has noted the feelings that the farming way of life produces requires greater, in-depth examination.

As the table below indicates, organizations are aware that farming men will not come forward if they feel that their mental health is being questioned as highlighted in the Irish example mentioned previously:

Figure Two UK/Canada on-line survey responses to perceived stigma of farmers (men) seeking help

Comments made by UK respondents in relation to stigma

"There is still a stigma about farmers(esp. males) seeking mental health counselling early"
"Rural community heavily steeped in autonomy and stigma of mental illness"
"There is still a very isolating stigma attached to mental health"
"There is stigma against mental health – perception"
"I believe that the title of the organization itself leads some people to believe that only people with mental health can seek help"

Comments made by Canadian respondents in relation to stigma

"There is still a lot of stigma attached to mental health issues. Women are more inclined to ask for help on their (husband's) behalf."
"They don't want to ask from anyone, least of all from an organisation that they'll regard as having a stigma."
"Farmers hate their neighbours to know they have a problem"
"Some see mental health concerns as a stigma and/or weakness."
"They don't want to ask from anyone, least of all from an organisation that they'll regard as having a stigma"

Clearly, therefore, rural support organizations in the UK and Canada have attempted to fill a niche demonstrating knowledge and acceptance of farming men coalescing

around issues such as socialization, inheritance, independence, pride and stoicism, embedded in the patrilineal farming culture (Ramirez-Ferrero, 2005). The organisations demonstrated awareness that although they predominantly see male farming suicide as the key issue they must address, farming men are also often unwilling to admit to needing support. The results from the on-line survey highlight that none of the organizations recorded 'mental health or suicidal feelings' as reasons for service users calling help lines. Neither was this expressed as unusual by the organisations which may be explained by their own adherence to the farming culture. The organisations do not appear to be conveying a message that leaving the land may be a more realistic option. Thus it can be said that patrilineal attachment to the land is being naturalised whilst at the same time becoming increasingly untenable.

Such continued acceptance of this feature of the culture means that family members, predominantly women (see Heather *et al.*, 2005) are soaking up the stress of their male partners. As the on-line survey demonstrates 86% of respondents felt that farming males were no more likely to suffer stress than farming females. However, 62% of respondents claimed that males received the most support from their organization. Clearly, therefore, other family members are being sidelined in the primacy given to the needs of farming men by organizations sympathetic to the culture and its conceptualization as highlighted earlier in the paper.

Rural Support Providers and Women as Emotional Caretakers of Farming Men

Organizations in the UK and Canada both commented that it is felt that farming men often pass on their stress to their female partners and that farming women have a strong instinct to keep the family together, even if that means making huge emotional and personal sacrifices. Again, this was seen as a natural feature of the culture of the family farming 'way of life'. Farming women have, consistently, demonstrated awareness that if they demand their own financial and legal rights, family farming as a way of life is threatened (see Mackenzie, 1992 and Price and Evans, 2005 for Canadian and UK examples). Women have been shown to be aware of the fragility of the male identity so perilously connected with a sense of belonging to both heritage and soil and increased their work burdens or 'pluriactivity' to enable farm and thus male survival (Ashton, 1991; Evans and Ilbery, 1996). The support organizations continue to normalise the priority given to men's feelings thus potentially contributing to feelings of pride and status that rural women often experience in being a supportive 'farmer's wife' (Bennett, 2005). The *Alberta Farm Stress Line* has produced a striking leaflet with

a farming woman silhouetted, leaning against a post with the strap line 'helping farm families in difficult times' (figure three below/next page.)

Figure Three Front cover of the *Alberta Farm Stress Line* leaflet



The absence of images of agricultural production is striking. The organization confirmed that within rural communities farming women are often expected to be the glue that holds farming families together (Price and Evans, 2006). Many organisations articulated, unquestioningly, that women continue to be an emotional prop to their husbands, often working off and on-farm and retaining responsibility for domestic and childcare work. Hence the organizations acknowledge that women's suffering often goes unnoticed.

Support organizations appear to be doing little to dispel the farmer/helper dichotomy. The imagery of the Albertan leaflet signifies the female as the emotional caretaker for the family. Whilst organizations sympathise with women's positions, they do little to challenge them. In fact it can be argued that they reinforce this feature of the culture. The organizations confirmed that many of the calls they receive were 'third-party' calls from women seeking help for their husbands or partners, rather than support for themselves. Whilst a representative from *an Organization in Northern Ireland* notes that:

'There is no gender specific agenda behind our literature. However, a man's emotional attachment to the land and issues over divorce and

*farm succession are coming across as an area of concern for male farmers. Farming is more than a business; it's your home, your lifestyle, your family, your entire **existence** is tied up on that farm'.*

A representative of the *Farm Crisis Network* in the UK also notes:

'It has to be said that our publicity to date has not been tailored to the needs of women, but of course farming women can feel trapped and depressed. But we have to be aware that it is farmers (men) who are committing suicide'.

Again, therefore, a narrowly focussed identity of farming men as 'farmers' attached to the places of farming comes through from the findings. When an identity is so narrowly constructed, support organizations and farming women are aware of the tragic consequences that can ensue and focus on this element of the culture in providing support.

Rural Support Providers: The Right to Stay on the land and Focus on External Pressures

The fifth dominant theme identified as influencing support provision was that farm families have a 'right' to stay on the land with their ensuing culture intact even when economic survival is untenable. This, of course, is a tenuous position. The survey results show that 85% of calls received by organizations related to financial difficulties which are largely perceived by service providers as an 'external' pressure imposed from outside the culture. Therefore, no blame is seen to be attributable to wanting to maintain a way of life that is often economically unviable and reliant on the unpaid labour of family members (Whatmore, 1991; Moran *et. al.* 1993). Shortall (2002) has also shown how powerful cultural attachment to the land is, even when the farm family earns its living elsewhere. Evidence of supporting such a culture is evident in a leaflet from the *Saskatchewan Farm Stress Line* which notes that rural families deserve credit for working hard to deal with problems that are 'beyond' their control such as weather, disease and low returns amidst uncertain times. By accepting that external influences are responsible for threatening the viability of the farming culture the position of farming men can remain unchallenged and wider circumstances held as responsible. Similar responses were noted by the *Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution* in the UK where risk of farm survival was acknowledged as due to falling farm incomes.

None of the organizations participating in the research appeared to be advising on exit strategies.

It is acknowledged that most rural support organizations do not claim to provide a counselling service. However, the type of support that is provided clearly 'shores' up the patrilineal farming culture and this raises questions as to how realistic and therefore effective such support is. A fatalistic attitude may be being propagated amongst farming individuals when blame is seen to be external to the farming family. The imagery of the *Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution* leaflet reinforces this point through its image of a male farmer leaning against a tractor, arms folded, looking pensively away from the camera.

Figure Four Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institutions - leaflet



The message conveyed in the leaflet suggests that there are other people struggling to depend on the land and that the organization understands attachment to the land and the right to remain there. The leaflet also depicts a pile of coins sitting within the landscape, with the strap line 'if the land no longer' provides. It is surmised that external global agri-economics inhibit the ability of the land to provide, but reinforce the right of the farming culture to continue.

Summary

The findings presented here highlight how rural support organisations in both the UK and Canada are influenced by and are supportive of a patrilineal farming culture as conceptualised earlier in the paper. None of the organizations involved in the research were questioning the patrilineal culture or the right of men, as 'farmer' to remain on the

land, or the dominant roles of farming women as 'helper' and were sympathetic to loss of cultural dominance being experienced in rural communities. The findings, therefore, demonstrate both the continued persistence of the culture and its influence on rural support.

Conclusions and research implications

Three overall conclusions can be derived from the research. They, along with their research implications are now discussed. **Firstly**, the findings demonstrate that the patrilineal culture of family farming is stubbornly persistent in both the UK and Canada and impacts on rural support provision. Here such cultural dominance has been shown to perpetuate generational gender roles and relations which are largely supportive of the patrilineal operation of family farming. Whilst it is tempting to say that such a situation is unrealistic given current global agri-economics the reality is that many farming individuals value such a 'way of life'

It is clear, then, that service provision within rural support organisations is largely focussed on being sympathetic to and having knowledge of the patrilineal farming culture. Questions are raised, therefore, as to how realistic support actually is; the extent to which appropriate training is received and its effectiveness. Clearly these organisations are comprised of hard-working individuals, usually coming from the culture of family farming and largely operating as volunteers. Understandably, organisations are focussed by the distressing figures of male, farming suicide and are responding to awareness that farming men will often only consult with those they perceive to be sympathetic to and understanding of a farming culture.

It may be that as farming crises are perceived to diminish along with funding for support organisations that an opportunity exists to locate such support within the remit of broader mainstream and long-standing farming and mental-health organisations. Here specialised training might be provided with professionals on the patrilineal culture of family farming so that support is informed accordingly. It appears that Canada is slightly ahead here with a few organisations such as the *Farm Counselling Service* in Prince Edward Island providing a private, professional service, contracted through a farming organisation. Such private service provision might aid in removing the 'stigma' of seeking help, whilst having the disadvantage of cost implications. Thus when suggesting retirement or exiting from farming where it is not profitable trained 'experts' may be seen to be placing their advice within knowledge of the farming culture. The

findings indicate that expecting farming service-users to access support within mainstream organisations, such as *The Samaritans* in the UK, without service providers having knowledge of farming culture is unlikely to be successful. Action research to gauge the success of private organisations and the extent to which mainstream organisations might develop training, particularly on the sensitive topic of farming suicide, presents an interesting way forward. Farming men have been shown to be unwilling to risk the stigma of using non-farming organisations; the extent to which they might access specialised and/or private services remains to be seen.

Secondly, the findings demonstrate that the culture of family farming has been shown to coagulate around the predominant gender coding of men as 'farmer' and women as 'helper'. Here, it is likely that farming support organisations have had a role in promoting and perpetuating the traditional role of women as unpaid 'helpers' on family farms. Again, this is understandable when so many of the volunteers come from the culture. Such volunteers are unlikely to negate the very culture from which most of them come and are providing support for. However, in focussing so predominantly on male farming suicide the findings indicate that the support of women is being side-lined. It has been demonstrated how both organisations and farming women fear for the psychological and physiological well-being of farm men. Organisations acknowledge the difficulties that farming women are faced with. As the findings demonstrate, however, farming women often appear to accept that providing such support is natural and embedded in the culture. Research is urgently needed, therefore, which focuses on the pressures farming women are experiencing within such a culture. Here research designs informed by feminist theorisation and which includes men may provide useful direction (Price, 2010a). The findings highlight the fear farming women have that if the farm does not survive neither will the men. Continually worrying about male farming suicide must put farming women under intense pressure and affect their thoughts and actions. Research might investigate, therefore, the extent to which farming women feel compelled to engage in on and off-farm work to supplement the farm or to stay in unhappy marriages.

From comments made by the service providers it appears that depression amongst farm women may be high, that they may be suffering domestic abuse and that alcoholism amongst farming men and women may be rife. Rather than continually reifying the impacts of such a culture, therefore, research must find sensitive ways to delve within it. Here ethnographic, longitudinal methods where trust and rapport is developed with farming individuals over time are likely to be crucial. Understanding the

culture, whilst also investigating its potentially damaging impacts is now urgently required.

The **final** key finding to emerge from the research is that theorisation on the features of the patrilineal culture where men, in particular, are shown to develop a sense of belonging to, of being part 'of' and belonging 'to' the land requires development. The findings highlight the stubborn persistence of the culture with its over-riding assumption that farming men, in particular, despite external pressures have a 'right' to stay on the land. This cultural identification with the land has often been shown to supersede financial imperatives and rational decisions over whether to stay in or leave farming. However, the ways in which identity and self become embedded in the places of family farming provides exciting research avenues. If farm and male survival are intertwined then theories of embodiment may usefully be drawn on to develop a deeper understanding of why so many farming men, internationally, take their own lives. Here the work of Caralon (2008) might provide useful direction in considering how consciousness and physicality are intertwined. The habitual repetitiveness of men's life on the land, despite technological advances, of often having grown up and living in the same home also resonates with Raymond Williams' 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1973). Here concepts of dwelling, belonging and ritual may be crucial to investigating the amalgamation of the physical and psychological self and the extent to which the consciousness of the male farmer is embedded in the land. Here it may be that land/identity becomes one. Useful theoretical direction might also be provided by considering the extent to which the repetitiveness, from birth, of the lives of farming men within the geographies of home, land and work produces psychological 'prop's without which the male, farming self withers (Harrison, 2000).

The international, comparative research drawn on here has provided exciting findings on the existence and operation of rural support organisations and the culture they are influenced by. Challenges now remain in developing research that might investigate in greater depth the derivation of such a culture and how best its impacts might be supported.

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