The Gendered Experiences of Wisconsin Dairy Farm Women

Kelly Soczka

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication

Division of Communication
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

Dr. Chris Sadler, Dr. Christy Brazee,
Dr. Jim Haney, and Mr. Bob Leege
Report on Oral Defense of Thesis

TITLE: The Gendered Experiences of Wisconsin Dairy Farm Women

AUTHOR: Kelly Soczka

Having heard the oral defense of the above thesis, the Advisory Committee:

X A) Finds the defense of the thesis to be satisfactory and accepts the thesis as submitted.

B) Finds the defense of the thesis to be unsatisfactory and recommends that defense be rescheduled contingent upon:

Advisory Committee:

Chris Sedler Chair of Committee Date: 5/21/07

James M. Hamby

Christ Brown
Dedication

There are a plethora of people that I would like to thank for their encouragement, words of advice, and unending support in the completion of this thesis. First I would like to thank my family Steve, Janice, and Amanda Soczka for believing in me.

Secondly I would like to thank Dr. Chris Sadler, Dr. Jim Haney, Dr. Christy Brazee, Mr. Bob Leege, and Dr. Karlene Ferrante for their academic assistance in completing this project. Bob, we always said that studying dairy farm women would make a great thesis, well, here it is.

Next I would like to thank Kraig Jones, Edgar Allain, Lynn Dwyer, Darla Leick, Michele Firkus, and the rest of the communication graduate students for their ability to listen to me talk endlessly about my thesis, farm women, and my love for agriculture.

I would like to lastly, thank Joe Kaiser, for continually asking me why my homework was not done yet, why my thesis was not done yet, and for then saying, “Get to it!” I needed that extra cajoling at times to get things finished. Joe, it was your love, patience, and encouragement that has allowed me to finally pursue my dreams.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Introduction &amp; Literature Review</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Influences</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological Influences</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Influences</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiencies in the Literature</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Foundation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Research Design</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Composition</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedure</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedure</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Researcher's Experience</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bracketing</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Verification</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Data Results</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Data</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Acceptance</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Analysis</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Wisconsin dairy farm wives are dynamic, engaging, women who are mothers, farmers, and leaders in the agriculture industry. The agriculture industry has undergone drastic transformations in recent decades due to economic, technological, and social influences. These influences have changed how farmers run their businesses, the types of tasks farmers need to complete, and the role of women on dairy farms.

This study examines the gendered experiences of dairy farm wives using a Moustaka's modified Steven-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis. This phenomenological study attempts to capture the essence of what it means to be a dairy farm wife in Wisconsin. More specifically, the research project discussed how women in partnership with their husbands communicated their gendered experiences, as well as, how agribusinesses and leadership organizations communicated to dairy farm wives their gendered experiences. In depth qualitative data was acquired by completing semi-structured interviews and farms tours with fourteen dairy farm wives from across the State of Wisconsin.

This study expected to find that roles of women have changed over time, when in fact, the study found that society has changed. Gendered roles and responsibilities in Wisconsin dairy farm families have not changed dramatically over the years. Instead, agribusinesses, leadership organizations, and society has begun to recognize the importance of the work that farm women do on dairy farms, their active role in decision making on farms, and are beginning to incorporate the image of a woman with that of a farmer.
Chapter One

Introduction

The agriculture industry in Wisconsin is changing drastically because of economic, technological, and social pressures. These pressures are also redefining the positions women hold in agriculture. Until recently, this system has been largely a male dominated field, with women having an invisible, but vital role. In the past, the communication of women has been significantly subdued in the United States because of the traditional patriarchal structure of American society.

In Wisconsin, as in the rest of the United States, farms are becoming larger in scale and more mechanized. With unanticipated rising production costs, a small labor pool, and record low commodity prices in the past decade, both men and women have had to find work off of the farm for additional income. The lack of retirement benefits and the high cost of health care have driven farm women to obtain employment off of the farm. These variables have also curtailed many new farmers from entering the business.

Technology has streamlined dairy farming and increased production capabilities. The introduction of the milking parlor has dramatically changed the process of milk production. It is faster, more efficient, better for the health of farmers, and increases the number of cows a farmer can milk. Tractors have become more sophisticated, comfortable, and expensive. Information technology has transformed farmers into savvy business men and women. It has given farmers in remote locations access to global markets.
These technological advances have made production agriculture more attractive to women. Women are more able to complete the work they may not have felt comfortable or capable of previously accomplishing, therefore, sole ownership of farms by women has become more feasible. Since the physical labor has been streamlined, women are more able to have time to work off of the farm as well. As technology advances, the role of women in the agricultural sector of Wisconsin is being reinvented to meet the demands placed upon them by their families and their businesses.

Many social networks and societal institutions have recognized the significance of women to the mission of their organizations. They have become integral and equal members in the world of agriculture. Educational institutions have begun to view women as a new source for recruitment. The retirement of baby boomers has caused a depreciation of the labor force in agriculture, as in other sectors of society. The number of people left to do work has dramatically declined, creating an immense need for women to enter the industry in a variety of roles.

The purpose of this study is to accurately describe and analyze the gendered experiences of dairy farm women in Wisconsin who are in partnership with their husbands. By interviewing dairy farm wives, this study will work to capture the communication they express to the outside world about themselves, as well as, the communication that is conveyed to them by other people. Assessing this communication will assist researchers in developing a clearer portrait of the roles that present day dairy farm wives in Wisconsin hold.
All of these pressures and factors have contributed to more reliance on women in the field of agriculture. Women have taken strides to reinvent their roles with the advent of these challenges and opportunities. This is evident in the available literature regarding women. The following literature review will outline the technological, economic, and social influences that have formed the modern dairy farm wife’s gendered experiences in Wisconsin.

**Literature Review**

The United States patriarchal society has made it difficult to track the progress of women, especially in production agriculture. Statistically, not much attention has been paid to women because the farms they lived on were in the names of their husbands. Often, women were statistically compartmentalized into categories with their husbands who held the farm in their name. They were not counted as farmers, but were only considered anonymous housewives.

Presenting the roles of women historically is troublesome because many rural farm women did not leave behind a record of their lives in diaries and letters (Jensen, 1981; Lueders Bolwerk, 1999). Few newspaper and magazine articles were written about the lives of women in rural Wisconsin (Lueders Bolwerk, 1999). Lacking relevant historical accounts and popular culture articles presenting a clear picture of the contributions women made to agriculture is a challenge. Instead, historical researchers took an industrialized look at farm work. Rosenfeld (1985) defined ‘industrialized work’ as the labor that occurred off of the farm and outside of the home. These industrialized models isolated the public and private spheres, separated the realms of men and women, and placed women
solely in the house (Lueders Bolwerk, 1999). Therefore, farm women faced a unique workplace that was commonly dismissed. Work that was not compensated, such as household chores and child rearing, were not considered in studies (Rosenfeld, 1985). The tasks women performed that were unpaid on the farm were overlooked by researchers because they were either unable to track their tasks or they were not interested in tracking their economic contribution.

Farming is not only an occupation, but for many, it is a way of life. The separation between family and the workplace, for women who are farming full time, is very minimal. The two occur simultaneously. Most of the research up to this point has focused on the actual farm tasks women completed and does not take into account both paid and unpaid work. Scholars studied paid positions, which were comprised mainly of their off farm jobs, largely ignoring the rest of their unpaid work on the farm or in the house (Rosenfeld, 1985).

One of the most important factors contributing to the gendered experiences of farm women is the influence that economic pressures have on the lives of women and their families. The desire for additional income has driven women to work off the farm and transformed the duties of females on the farm. Thus, the following section will review the economic contributors to this metamorphosis.

**Economic Influences**

Economic factors have been highly influential on the structure of the family farm. The agriculture economy routinely fluctuates due to natural disasters, undesirable weather, overseas competition, and the availability of resources.
Prices rise and fall drastically due to the supply and demand of consumer goods. Production agriculture, in the eyes of many, is similar to gambling because of its risky nature. Stringent management skills are needed to be successful in the dairy industry. The structure, size, and number of dairy farms have seen considerable changes in recent decades. The size of the farm has had a considerable impact on the type of work women perform on the farm, the amount of free time women have, the number of employees they may hire, and the need for off farm employment.

In Wisconsin, in particular, family farms have remained a steady source of labor for production agriculture. Women have remained a necessary, integral, and valuable source of labor on dairy farms. The state has long relied on medium-sized, diversified, family-labor farms as the backbone of Wisconsin’s dairy industry (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000). Ninety-nine percent of all of the farms in the United States and in Wisconsin are still operated by individuals, family partnerships, or are family corporations (“You’ve never been,” 2005; Farm Facts, 2004). Over the past few decades, the dairy industry in Wisconsin has seen adaptations to herd size, milking levels, production technologies, and management practices. Even with these dramatic influences, most mid-sized dairy operations in the state are still operated and owned by farm household members (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000). The structure of the business directly influences the type of experience that a woman will have on her farm.

The overall low milk prices and high input expenses have reduced profit margins in dairy farming significantly. Low prices have added increased pressure
on dairy farmers to milk more cows in order to maintain levels of sufficient income to support the family (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000). This has adversely affected cash-poor beginning farmers, highly indebted farms, those with fixed incomes, and those who have little off farm revenue (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000).

When the number of cows increases, the roles and responsibilities of women on the farm change. Women may be more likely to perform less physical labor in the barn, if additional help is hired to do the milking and tend the livestock. Typically, as the number of cows increase, so does the technology for milking the cows, warranting additional hired labor. Although the relative number of people needed on a farm is smaller than has been the case historically, farms have become more dependent on hired labor. This may give women more time to work off of the farm for another employee or the increased revenue from the additional cows may allow the wife to remain working on the farm. The economic position of the farm highly affects the roles the women have in the family business.

In order to assist in keeping the Wisconsin family farm afloat, women went in search of occupational positions off of the farm. Carol Lueders Bolwerk (1999) cited in her findings that:

Past researchers have demonstrated that women’s work changed dramatically during the Great Depression of the 1930’s, and again during the Farm Crisis of the 1980’s, and 1990’s. During these financial crises, farm women worked off the farm to support the farm enterprise (p. 7).
Women have gone out into the work world during these times of crisis, but it appears they have remained employed off the farm.

The dairy industry, in particular, has seen especially volatile fluctuations and tight profit margins in recent decades. Wisconsin farm women and men have had to seek off farm employment to keep their farm business viable. Milk prices in the 1990's were roughly 20% lower than in 1960 and about 40% lower than the peak price paid for milk in 1979 (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000). Wages decreased, while inputs continued to rise. Currently, the average farm operator household in 2005 will continue a five year string of increases from all time record lows in the early 1990’s. The Economic Research Service (2007) reports that the average income earned by the farm operator household before expenses was $81,588. This increase is up 2.2% from the income forecast of 2006 (ERS, 2007). Yet, the ERS (2007) also predicts that after factoring in higher input expenses, the average net cash farm income on family farms is projected to only be $17,271 in 2007. Furthermore, when adjustments are made for depreciation, farm income owed to others in the household, and other farm-related earnings, the average operator household income from the farm is projected to only be $11,488 (ERS, 2007).

In the United States the number of farms has decreased over the past seven decades, from a historic high of 6.8 million farms in 1935 to 2.2 million in 2002 (Stam & Dixon, 2004). Wisconsin is no exception to this trend. The U.S. Census Bureau statistics indicate that the state lost almost 13% of its farms and over 10% of its farmland between 1987 to 1997 (Jackson-Smith, Moon, Ostrom, & Barham,
Jackson-Smith et al. (2000) also discovered that the decline in farm numbers was particularly severe for mid-sized commercial livestock farms in Wisconsin.

Women have continued to be employed off of the farm for a variety of reasons. Many women are working for other employers in order to take advantage of health insurance and retirement benefits. Women are also working in town because the income that is generated is a steady, stable stream of revenue for the family. Grondine (2006) suggests that:

Women have always played a critical role on the farm. But now, more farm women are finding themselves in a new role: working to help support their farming husbands and the family homestead with off farm revenue. They work as teachers, nurses, paralegals, and in many other professions that provide health insurance and other benefits, in addition to stable homes, so that their families can continue in the farming business (p. 1).

Family farms have begun to rely heavily on this additional income. “In 1977, off farm income comprised 57% of the per capita personal income of the farm population” (Lueders Bolwerk, 1999; Maret & Copp, 1982). The reliance of additional income from women has continued to increase. “In fact, off-farm income has grown steadily to account for 80% of the average farm household income,” according to Grondine (2006, p. 1). The 2002 Census of Agriculture reports that for all principal operators in the United States, 63.1% of them stated that only 25% of their income is derived from the farm income (Allen & Harris, 2005). Many men also work away from the farm to generate additional income,
yet it is women who make up the larger share of off farm work. Grondine (2006) stated, “39% of women presently work off of the farm, compared to 32% of men” (p. 1). Lastly, Grondine (2006) highlights another role farm women actively engage in:

That in addition to working off of the farm, women also tend to manage the farming business by keeping the books, ordering supplies, maintaining customer relations, developing marketing plans, and overseeing many other aspects involved in running a successful family business (p. 2).

One noteworthy theme expressed in the past few decades is the reliance of women in the role of bookkeeper. Rosenfeld (1985) speculates that women may have had more education than their husbands, thus they have traditionally kept the books on the farm. It has been hypothesized that women over the generations have been given better opportunities for education with greater access to universities and the expectation by families to attend higher learning institutions (Lueders Bolwerk, 1999). This increased education makes women better candidates for handling tax preparation, developing marketing plans, and for conducting transactions with other businesses.

All of these economic variables are playing a large part in the composition of the family farm. The economy directly drives the structure of the labor force on the farm. The economy determines how many people can be supported on the farm income and if supplemental funds will be needed to ensure survival. Finally, the economy highly influences the roles and occupations of farm women in Wisconsin.
Another pertinent factor determining change in how females define themselves is how technological advances have impacted women. Farm and communication technologies have transformed the way business is being conducted on the farm. The next section will discuss this influence in further detail.

**Technological Influences**

Since the 1940’s, mechanization on farms has had an enormous impact on farm size, workloads, and the distribution of food in the United States. Innovative technologies in hybrid forages, tractors, and in animal genetics, have caused an explosion in the productivity of agricultural products. For instance, the average U.S. corn yields have risen from 28 bushels per acre in 1901 to almost 160 bushels an acre in 2004 (Henderson & Weiler, 2004). Jason Henderson and Stephen Weiler (2004) also reports that currently, “Less than two hours of labor are needed to produce 100 bushels of corn,” (p. 2). Thus, these productivity gains mean that fewer people are needed to complete work in production agriculture. The technological advancements suggest that the tasks women and men needed to complete on the farm have become less labor intensive.

After World War II, women were assuming the more suburban roles of housewives as farms became more mechanized (Trauger, 2004; Jellison, 1993; Neth, 1995). This suburban image was developing across the country as women were expected to contribute to the ideal family structure. The structure was designed to maintain the perfect domestic household for their working husbands (Trauger, 2004). This role marginalized the amount of work that was previously
expected from women in the daily operation of the farm. Essentially, women were pushed back into the house, where they were designated to run errands, and raise the children.

The technological changes in 19th and 20th centuries were incredibly vast and diverse. Not only did technology excel on the farm with advances in machinery, but other advancements including the cell phone, the Internet, and computers have affected the lives of farmers. Currently, 58% of farms have computers and of those users, 92% of them are under the age of 35 (Sirekis, 2004). In 2004, 90% of the American Farm Bureau Young Farmer and Ranchers surveyed reported using cell phones (Sirekis, 2004). Agriculture has gone from the horse-drawn cart to the air-conditioned, fully automatic, gas driven tractor in a matter of a few decades. The growth of technology in the United States has dramatically affected the daily routines of male and female farmers.

Communication technology has modified operations on Wisconsin farms in both subtle and dramatic ways. Farmers are no longer “unreachable” and the modern convenience of the cell phone has modified the business of agriculture. Now, agriculturalists can be making business connections and completing work in remote locations. A farmer can be driving a tractor while simultaneously conducting business with the banker on their cell phone. The Internet has also kept communication lines open for farmers and has provided phenomenal access to information for their businesses at a moment’s notice. Access to information regarding markets and weather reports have increased farmers’ bottom lines. Marketing, information technology, and communication have been a driving force
in the transformation of the business end of farming. In a New York Times article, farm operator Cheryl Rogowski, said, “Farming has changed, and farmers now have to do things that they are traditionally not good at: marketing, educating consumers, collective action, communication, and it can’t be a coincidence that women are traditionally good at those things” (Moskin, 2005, p. 1). It is no coincidence that female operators are surfacing to fill these public relations positions on their farms. Technology has moved communication to the forefront of production agriculture’s businesses, with women becoming the spokeswomen for agriculture.

Farmers, as in many other businesses, have been able to capitalize on the new marketplace created by the Internet. Many Wisconsin agriculturalists have taken advantage of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection’s (DATCP), “Savor Wisconsin” Web site. SavorWisconsin.com is an online directory and resource for consumers across the world to find agricultural products and services from the State of Wisconsin. This free service to growers allows them to post their products on line, includes a site map to their farms, and can link them directly to their farm’s Web site, if so desired (DATCP, 2005). This joint Web site venture is funded by DATCP, the Wisconsin Apple Grower’s Association, a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant, and the University of Wisconsin – Extension. SavorWisconsin.com, in one year, has grown to more than 1,000 registered Wisconsin businesses and has on average 4,300 visitors per month (DATCP,

Some of the businesses highlighted on the Web site include a range of; sustainable agricultural products, traditional consumer goods, value-added products, and agriculture tourism attractions. With economic pressures causing farms to diversify and sell more value added products, women have begun to capitalize on these unique businesses. Value added products, according to the USDA (2005), “are created when a producer takes an agricultural commodity, like milk or vegetables, and processes or prepares it in a way that increases the value to the customer” (p. 1).

The other avenue that women have pursued to increase the family income is by raising sustainable agricultural crops. Sustainable agriculture, as defined by the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, is a form of agriculture that produces an abundant amount of food, while not depleting the earth’s natural resources or creating harmful pollution (Earles, 2005). The typography of tasks completed when raising sustainable crops is largely non-mechanized, labor intensive, and does not often include applying chemicals. Traguer (2004) emphasizes in her research that women are more likely to operate small scale farms and specialize in sustainable crops, including vegetable and greenhouse crops, which have enjoyed an increase in sales. She attributes the growth of women in this sector to the fact that women are more able to do the work that is required (Trauger, 2004). Technology has made the work less labor intensive, in turn, allowing more women the ability to construct successful agricultural
businesses. Secondly, the consumer demand for locally raised, organic, and fresh vegetables has grown drastically in recent years. Land in organic production has doubled in the 1990's, which has subsequently included an increase in participation by women (Trauger, 2004).

Creating less labor intensive production agriculture through technology has influenced the rise in the numbers of women as sole operators of farm businesses. In 1978, the United States Department of Agriculture began to keep records of women who were sole owners of farms. Their numbers increased from 128,000 in 1978, to 155,000 in 1997 (Trauger, 2004). Trauger’s (2004) research further states; “the percentage of all farmers who are women has nearly doubled in this time, from 5% to 9%” (p. 291). The number of men decreased during this period by 400,000 male operators, while the number of women involved is on the rise (Trauger, 2004; ERS, 2001; Rosenfeld, 1985). Even more recently, Allen and Harris (2005) noted that the number of women as principal operators increased by 13.4% from the 1997 to 2002, according to the Census of Agriculture reports.

In the 2002 census, a category was created to reflect a more accurate record of women in agriculture. The prior census information only counted the women who were principal operators, but did not take into account women who farmed in partnership with their husbands. Thus, a large number of women who depended on farming as their sole livelihood were excluded. The sons and daughters, who farmed in partnership with their parents and depended on their sole income from the farming operation, had also been unaccounted for. The new census form asks how many individuals on each operation are qualified as farm
operators and how many of those who are qualified are women. This consideration created a more realistic picture of today’s farming operations.

Rich Allen and Ginger Harris (2005) from the USDA report that, “Some 62.3 % of all farms reported only one operator, but, in total, 3,115,172 operators were identified on the 2,128,982 farms. Of the operators, some 847,832 were women” (p. 10). Of the 847,832 women, 237,819 were principal operators and 540,090 were second operators (Allen & Harris, 2005). Twenty-seven percent of all production agriculturalists are females, with 11% of them as sole operators (Allen & Harris, 2005). Women have become one the largest growing sources of new farmers in the United States.

As a result of lowering the amount of time needed to complete chores on the farm, the time allotted for socializing increased. The technological advancements that drove productivity to record levels, in addition, made it possible for the sons and daughters of farmers to work in other occupations off of the farm. For many, it was the first time they could attend a technical institution or university in order to further their education. The next contributing factor to the diversification of women in the agriculture sector can be credited to the support displayed by social structures in recruiting women. These institutions have begun to integrate women into their systems and are facilitating the training to produce articulate leaders for the industry.

**Social Influences**

“Whatever you do, don’t call her a farmer’s wife,” was the opening statement of an article appearing in the *Fort Worth Star – Telegram* in March of
2001 (“A Growing Role,” 2001). This statement rings true for many women, including Wisconsin’s dairy farm women. This is one example of the sentiment being expressed by many women in agriculture. Why? Women are no longer only completing the traditional house chores and raising children; they have ventured into the business side of the farm. Diane Klienfelter (“A Growing Role,” 2001), a Texas-based extension service economist who has worked in programs with women farmers, believes:

Twenty years ago, it was a good ol’ boy world, and the little lady was the housewife and took care of the children and maybe did the books. There are strong exceptions, but those were not the norm. It was an accepted notion that they didn’t know farm machinery, livestock. It was a bias, and women have had to prove themselves to change it (p. 1).

The stereotype, “just a farm wife” or “a farmer’s wife” developed over the years that marginalized the contribution of farm women. Women actively involved in agriculture have had to work to break this stereotype of the years to prove that they do have knowledge about livestock, can operate farm machinery, and are as capable as their husbands on the farm.

Women have working to change the model for the American women in agriculture. In the United States, many women are making business management decisions, are compiling the bookkeeping, and are tending to livestock (Vogt, Jackson-Smith, Ostrom & Lezberg, 2001). Women are pushing to dispel this stereotype and are working to portray their true identities to society. Female farmers no longer want to viewed in the stereotypical “farmer’s wife” role.
In the next section, the discussion will contain information about the societal support structures that are appearing in educational institutions, agricultural leadership organizations, and in business. These support networks are recognizing and encouraging the involvement of women in the industry. One of the first groups to accept women and encourage their equal involvement was the FFA organization.

The first big step of the integration of women into leadership positions and agriculture education came in 1969, when female students were allowed to become national members in the FFA organization (National FFA Organization, 2005). The National FFA Organization is comprised of middle school and high school students. It enhances the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. Only four decades earlier, in 1930, the all-male delegation at the 3rd National FFA convention had adopted a membership clarification to restrict membership to only male students (National FFA Organization, 2005). This tiny step in 1969 spoke volumes and transformed the face of agricultural education forever. Today, 38% of FFA members are female and 50% of the leadership positions on the state levels of the organization are held by women (National FFA Organization, 2005).

Social organizations that agriculturalists belong to are continuing to fluctuate and evolve as the farm landscape for females continues to progress. One prime example of the transformation of support groups in Wisconsin is the 'Heart of the Farm – Women in Agriculture’ program sponsored by the University of
Wisconsin - Extension. It was originally started in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s to provide education programs for farm women designed to teach them farm management skills (Kirkpatrick, Roth, Vanderlin, Zeuli, Gildersleeve, & Bernhardt, 2003). The classes were abandoned at that time due to the lack of participation. The program was deemed unsuccessful because many women were leaving farms and obtaining occupations in town. A lack of leadership was also blamed for not focusing the correct attention on topic relevance (Kirkpatrick et al., 2003).

The group was reinstated a number of years later and conferences were held across the state addressing current issues affecting women. The group provided information to participants connecting them with agricultural resources and creating support networks for farm women. One Eau Claire participant stated:

Heart of the Farm wasn’t a fluff program. You didn’t treat us like ‘women’. You gave us real information. We make decisions just like our husbands do, and we need this information to make better decisions (Kirkpatrick et al., 2003, p. 1).

A survey completed by the 150 participants of the workshops found that the majority of women, 85%, regularly or sometimes perform the farm bookkeeping (Kirkpatrick et al., 2003; “Farm women’s program”, 2006). Since women are closely connected to the farm’s finances, the women’s involvement in the decision making process of daily operations is critical. Surveyed women said they were most likely to be a part of the decision making in relation to long-term planning and farm investments (“Farm women’s program”, 2006). Women also
believed to a lesser degree that they influenced the decisions that relate to farm labor, livestock, or dairy management ("Farm women's program", 2006). The survey also concluded that women in Wisconsin are highly aware of their new responsibilities to the farm business, with 60% stating their roles are changing. Eighty-two percent of participants agreed that they were satisfied with the changes (Kirkpatrick et al., 2003).

These social networks are communicating to women that they recognize the change happening to their positions on Wisconsin farms. These institutions are striving to include women and assist in training women for their new roles. As Wisconsin farm women have stated, their roles are transitioning and this thesis will work to further explore the ramifications of these modifications to their family lives, their occupational lives, and their social lives.

The literature review provides a foundation for the discussion of themes that will be revealed later in the firsthand accounts of Wisconsin farm women. By listening to the experiences of farm women and how they make sense of their roles, the public, and their families, and society will be able to understand the farm wives’ positions as a business partners. The next portion of this project argues why research in this area warrants further exploration.

**Deficiencies in the Literature**

Research about women in agriculture in the United States is rather limited. Literature involving women has been largely historical in nature, with an emphasis on urban women. Urban women have been easier to study because they were located in condensed areas, whereas women living on farms were spread
throughout the countryside. Women in urban areas also had more educational opportunities and were more likely to record their lives (Rosenfeld, 1985). Transportation deficiencies and lack of proficient telecommunications methods made research daunting in rural areas.

Historically, not much attention has been paid to females in agriculture because they did not typically own land in America's patriarchal society. Often, women were lumped into categories with their husbands who held the farm in husband's name. The United States' patriarchal society has made it harder to track the progress of women and their stake in the business.

Studies of farm women generally appeared in the early 1980's, after the feminist movement brought women to the forefront in the minds' of researchers in the 1960's and 1970's. In the 1980's, a new paradigm was desired to explain the overlap between a women's' roles on the farm and their new employment positions off of the farm. An enormous amount of women living on farms began to take off farm jobs to supplement the family's farm income during this time of economic crisis (Rosenfeld, 1985). Many research projects were conducted in the early 1980's in conjunction with the updated census information to explain the roles of farm women. A large conglomeration of information is missing between the 1980s until the present. None of these studies focused on the communication that was occurring to assist or hinder this process. Hence, this study would build upon the work of previous researchers and aid in filling in this discontinuity.
Research Questions

The research questions that drove this project include:

1. How do dairy farm women, in partnership with their spouses, communicate their gendered experiences on Wisconsin farms in the 21st century?

2. How do agribusinesses and agriculture leadership organizations communicate to dairy farm women, in partnership with their spouses, their gendered experiences on Wisconsin farms in the 21st century?

The focus of the study is the communication of Wisconsin farm wives' gendered experiences.

Theoretical Foundation

In order to find answers to the above stated questions, a specific theoretical lens was used to guide the discovery of whether or not gendered barriers exist. Researchers have varying theories they utilize to view the world around them and have several techniques for identifying the phenomenon that they see.

This research project applied a traditional phenomenological approach to the subject in order to uncover the gendered experiences of dairy farm women in Wisconsin. The phenomenological structure concentrates on comprehending the world through the conscious experience of a person. This set of theories assumes that humans interpret their world through their personal experiences and observations of their interactions with others (Creswell, 1998). Humans give meaning to their worlds through their narratives and interactions with others.
One theoretical lens that will be used to explore the breaking of traditional roles of women in American society is through muted group theory. This theory was first developed by social anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener. Edwin Ardener (1975) theorized that the groups on the top of the social ladder determine, to a large extent, the dominant communication patterns of the society, while the subordinate groups become inarticulate.

Edwin Ardener (1975) argued that society classifies human beings in two sets, female/male or human/non-human. Man believes that mankind is based on 'man', therefore their opposites, women and animals, tend to be ambiguously placed. He further believed that not only are women muted, but so are other less articulate groups such as children, minorities, and the poor (Ardener, 1975).

When studying tribal groups, Ardener realized that his fellow male colleagues added to the suppression of the muted group by focusing their attention on talking with the men in the group (Ardener, 1975). The men appeared more articulate than women because it was the process of one like-minded person talking to another like-minded person. They share a common thread, their gender, making it easier for them to relate to each other. Traditionally, the males of the group act as translators, interpreters, or speakers for the group (Ardener, 1975). Hence, the women in society have had no way to voice to the outside world their thoughts, ideas, or aspirations.

Cheris Kramarae went a step further than the Ardeners and applied this theory to communication. Cheris Kramarae's (1981) definition of muted group theory includes the idea that, "the language of a particular culture does not serve
all of its speakers equally, for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation,” (p. 1). Kramarae (1981) believes it provides a way to conceptualize two structures, the underlying “template structures” of a group of people and the “structure of realization.” The underlying structure may not be known to the group because they may only be reflected through the dominant group’s signs or symbols.

The “inarticulate” woman has developed because the language used is derived from their dominant male counterpart’s perceptions of reality (Kramarae, 1981). These researchers believe that language is used to assign meaning to a human’s view of the world. Over the years, the dominant group may develop a system of communication that supports this worldview, subjecting others to experiences that the language does not reflect, in effect muting their subordinate’s worldview (Kramarae, 1981).

Lastly, Kramarae makes some assumptions regarding muted group theory, which will be useful to the analysis of women in American agriculture. In regards to the relationships between men in women, Kramarae (1981) designates the following assumptions:

1. Women perceive the world differently than men because of women’s and men’s different experiences and activities rooted in the division of labor.

2. Because of their political dominance, the men’s system of perception is dominant, impeding the free expression of the women’s alternative models of the world.
3. In order to participate in society, women must transform their own models in terms of the received male system of expression (p. 3).

Women have been, and still are, the minority group in the American agricultural labor force. According to muted group theory, women fit the profile of a group that may be muted. Is an equalizing of the gender groups surfacing in agriculture? Is a new conceptual model needed to scrutinize the communication between the genders? Are there still sectors in society in which women are still working to break these artificial communication boundaries? This thesis will attempt to answer these questions in the following chapters.
Chapter Two

Research Design

In order to effectively understand and comprehend if these gendered roles are changing, researchers must learn more through studying the dairy farm wife’s gendered experiences. One way to capture the farm wife’s perception of the communication that is occurring, which forms her identity, is to capture data using a phenomenological inquiry perspective. Krider and Ross (1997) define phenomenology as “both a philosophy and a research method for studying the meaning of lived experience” (p. 438). The end goal of data collection from a phenomenological approach is to find a unified meaning or theme that is expressed by the participants.

A phenomenological approach has been chosen due to the lack of research conducted on dairy farm women in the communication field with this type of research tool. The best method to capture gendered experiences is by using a phenomenological approach. Research concerning women in agriculture in the United States is limited. Literature involving women has largely been historical in nature, with an emphasis on urban women (Rosenfeld, 1985). Urban women have been easier to study because they lived in condensed areas, whereas, women living on farms were spread throughout the countryside. Transportation deficiencies and lack of proficient telecommunications methods also made research daunting.

Studies of farm women generally appeared in the early 1980’s, after the feminist movement brought women to the forefront in the minds of researchers in
the 1960’s and 1970’s. In the 1980’s, a new paradigm was desired to explain the overlap of the women’s farm and family roles, including, the transformation in the structure of the agricultural marketplace. This new model could account for the way a production system based on the household, as well as corporate units framed women’s lives (Haney & Knowles, 1988). Many research projects were conducted in the early eighties in conjunction with the updated census information to explain the roles of farm women.

A large gap of information about dairy farm women is missing between the 1980’s and the present. Hence, this study has built upon the work of previous researchers and aids in filling in this discontinuation of examination. Haney and Knowles’s (1988), Sachs’s (1983), Rosenfeld’s (1985), and Whatmore’s (1991), research has been largely sociological, historical, or feminist in nature. A dissertation completed by Carol Lueders Bolwerk (1999) also addressed this topic using a biographical and ethnographic approach to studying Wisconsin’s dairy farm women. She interviewed twenty-two women from sixteen dairy farms in her anthropological dissertation (Lueders Bolwerk, 1999).

The more contemporary research projects used to ascertain farm wives’ gendered experiences has been collected by the use of self-report surveys. These surveys were conducted by the Program on Agricultural Technology Studies (PATS), a division of the University of Wisconsin – Madison and the University of Wisconsin – Cooperative Extension, to discover how the roles of Wisconsin’s women in production agriculture are evolving. The survey was conducted in 2001, but was only completed by thirty-five respondents (Vogt et al., 2001). The
rationale for obtaining this information for the extension was to tailor their programs more effectively to their female farm audience. The extension has used the information they collected to ensure the programs they are presenting are useful, attractive to their audience, and are valued by participants.

There is a lack of information regarding the communication of farm wives' gendered experiences and how this communication has affected their identities. No one has taken the time, effort, or money to ask these women how their roles have been communicated to them or how they have communicated their roles to others. As a result, this research will build upon previous work and will tread into unexplored waters.

**Participant Composition**

The population being questioned in this study has been limited to dairy farm women in Wisconsin who are in partnership with their husbands. In the past, literature has focused on dairy farming in a traditional family farm setting; therefore, comparisons from previous research can be used to examine this phenomenon. Of the total number of the farms in the United States, only 11.2% of the farms are solely operated by women (Allen & Harris, 2005). This percentage continues to decline when looking at the number of female principal operators in Wisconsin. In 2002, the Economic Research Service reported that there were 7,353 principal female farm proprietors in Wisconsin (ERS, 2007). Therefore due time restraints and lack of financial funding, this study will focus on the larger group of women in agriculture in Wisconsin, which are farm women who are in partnership with their husbands in the dairy industry.
The sample size was limited to seven women from mid-sized dairy farms and seven women from large-sized dairy farms. Most of the dairy farms in Wisconsin fall in the mid-sized category, with farms milking 30 to 99 cows representing 70% of all Wisconsin dairy operations (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000). This group owns almost two-thirds of Wisconsin’s milk cows and produces 62% percent of the state’s milk. Mid-sized farms for this project were defined as having 30 to 99 cows.

The next cohort, large-sized dairy farms were defined as farms with 100 to 500 cows (see Figure 1). Dairy farms in the 100 to 499 herd range represent 10.6% of the operations and produce 31% percent of the milk (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000). The only two groups that were not studied included the group under 30 cows, which constitutes 18.7% of dairy farms in Wisconsin and the group with over 500 cows, which represents .3% of the dairy facilities (Jackson-Smith & Barham, 2000). Therefore, this study only examined the mid-sized to large-sized dairy facilities that represent 81% of all the dairy farms in Wisconsin. The women in these two distinct cohorts exhibited some unique differences in their gendered experiences because the structures of their farms assist in influencing their roles.
Figure 1
Size Structure of Wisconsin and United States Dairy Farm Sector, 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dairy Farms by Herd Size Class</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 30 cows</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49 cows</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 cows</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-199 cows</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-499 cows</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 cows or more</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milk Produced by Herd Size Class</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Wisconsin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 30 cows</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-49 cows</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99 cows</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-199 cows</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-499 cows</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 cows or more</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The participants were obtained using purposeful sampling. Cope (2005) correctly references Patton’s (1990) justification for the use of purposeful sampling by stating:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research, thus the term purposeful sampling (p. 167).

This study lends itself to purposeful sampling because all of the participants involved in the study must experience the same phenomenon or event. They also must be participants that are willing to express their opinions freely and share
their experiences with the researcher. The researcher acquired the sample population from the dairy farm women that she has worked with while employed with the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation. All of the participants are or were Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation members. The researcher identified with the participants in a professional capacity.

Seven dairy farm wives on mid-sized farms and seven dairy farm wives on large-sized farms were chosen because of realistic time constraints and were selected according to a typical case sampling method (Krider & Ross, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Purposeful sampling was used in order to capture participants between the ages of 25 and 40 years of age. Women younger than 25 were less likely to be fully established in the business and those older than 50 are looking towards retirement, therefore these age cohorts were excluded from the study. Middle aged participants were more likely to be experiencing this transitional phenomenon. Women are the main focus of this study because they are the segment of society experiencing the greatest alteration in their occupational roles.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The data was collected using long, semi-structured interviews that were audiotaped for accuracy. Berger (2000) describes a semi-structured interview in the following manner: "Here, the interviewer usually has a written set of questions to ask the informant, but tries, to the extent possible, to maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interviews" (p. 112). This type of environment was beneficial for obtaining gendered experiences from the participants. It allowed the participants to freely express their thoughts, while still
having an outline from which to shape the conversation. Follow-up questions were used when the answers required further clarification. Each female participant orally responded to the questions in Appendix A.

A consent form was signed by the respondents, allowing the interviews to be audiotaped (see Appendix B). In addition to the consent form, participants completed the demographic questions in Appendix C to provide a broader picture of their individual operations. The demographic information provided the reader with a reference tool with which to better comprehend the role of the participant in their families' agricultural operations. The raw data was then transcribed from the sixty minute long audiotapes into text for examination by the researcher. Due to realistic time constraints, the researcher hired a legal secretary to transcribe the data into text. The researcher reviewed the tapes for accuracy and corrected any errors that occurred.

Research approval was solicited from University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point Institutional Review Board to conduct semi-structured interviews on human subjects. Interviews were conducted in January and February. During the winter months, the participants had more free time available to participate. The only downside to carrying out interviews during the winter was the sub-zero temperatures and unpredictable weather. Throughout the interviews and farm tours, extensive field notes were taken to supplement and compliment audiotaped material in the event that an audiotape became damaged.

The interviews took place at the residence of the farm couple and began with a tour of their dairy facility. The initial farm tour lasted about thirty to forty-
five minutes, depending upon the size of the farm, the temperature outside, and upon the respondent's willingness to share their thoughts. Some of the farm tours were shortened due to below zero temperatures that transpired in late January and early February. The researcher adapted by asking additional questions regarding their operations at the kitchen table before the formal portion of the interview began.

All of the participants agreed to be audiotaped during the interviews at the participants' kitchen tables. Each participant was phoned prior to the interview. The researcher explained the procedure, confirmed an interview date, requested directions to their farm, and obtained initial permission to audiotape the interview. The respondents were assured their names would remain completely anonymous, even though some of the information collected may be published. The participants were reassured during the interview their name will not be associated in any way, shape, or form with the publication.

A pseudonym was used to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Participants in this study were informed that they did not have to participate in this study, could refuse to respond to questions, or could withdraw from the study at any time. It was explained that withdrawal from the study would not lead to any hurt feelings or have any negative repercussions. Lastly, a short letter was sent to the participant confirming the interview date and time. The letter included the demographic sheet and consent form for the interview. The participant was asked to fill out this information prior to the interview. This allowed the participant more time to accurately fill out the demographic sheet and it gave
them time to read the consent form in its entirety. These two forms were collected the day of the interview.

To avoid distractions and in order to make interviewees more comfortable, they were asked to block two hours of their time for the interview. All of the interviews were conducted at the participants’ kitchen tables to ensure an interruption-free and warm environment.

Although the time was allotted by the participants, distractions did occur. Many of the participants’ children were present during the interviews and caused the participants to become distracted. This distraction was unavoidable because the women being interviewed are the primary child care providers and hiring day care for an hour was unrealistic. The other unanticipated and unavoidable distraction was the interruption of the telephone. Many of the interviews were halted because the participants needed to answer the telephone. The researcher politely attempted to keep each participant focused on the interview.

The researcher carried out all the interviews and the data is stored in a locked safe in the researcher’s home. The data obtained from the interviews will be retained for five years and will then be destroyed.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

The Moustaka’s modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method has been chosen to analyze this phenomenological study (Moustaka, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). The first step in this method was to write a full description of the experience the researcher has had with the phenomenon. In the description, the analyst not only described the phenomenon, but also bracketed out personal bias
regarding the phenomenon. Bracketing is when the analyst sets aside preconceived notions or experiences, as much as humanly possible (Moustaka, 1994; Creswell, 1998).

Next, the researcher reviewed the transcribed data and extracted out significant statements about how the participants are experiencing the phenomenon. This process, called horizontalization, includes the discovering of significant statements relevant to the topic and assigning them equal value (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998). Patton (2002) describes this step in the following manner, “The data are spread out for examination, with all elements and perspectives having equal weight,” (p. 486).

The third step consisted of the researcher listing each of the non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement (Moustakas, 1994). Patton (2002) believes the step is a process of delimitation, whereby the researcher eliminates irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data. These statements were then grouped into meaningful units, groups, or themes. These statements are called invariant horizons or meaning units (Moustakas, 1994).

The analyst concludes by writing a structural description of experience and the essence of the experience, including verbatim quotes of the experience (Creswell, 1998). An attempt was made by the researcher to capture the essence of the experience. In this specific study, the analyst attempted to describe the essence of what it is like to be a dairy farm woman in Wisconsin and how their gendered roles were communicated. The study also attempted to capture the
essence of how women perceived their gendered interactions with agribusinesses and leadership organizations.

**The Researcher’s Experience**

When going into a study, a researcher must reflect upon their experiences, personal opinions, and assumptions about the phenomenon. This will help assist other researchers in validating the results of this study. The researcher will first describe her experience in agriculture and the dairy industry. The analyst will then describe her relationship with agriculture leadership organizations and agribusinesses. Lastly, the researcher will bracket out her personal presumptions of the phenomenon being studied.

My experience with dairy farming started at a young age. I was raised on a dairy farm in Wisconsin where my parents milked fifty Holstein cows in a tie stall barn. My parent’s dairy farmed until I was about twelve years of age. They sold the cows, kept their farm, and pursued other employment avenues. My involvement in agriculture continued on the farm when the family decided to raise ginseng and beef cattle. I am currently living on an 80 acre farm where I raise beef cattle in partnership with a neighbor and my father.

I gained an even better appreciation for dairy farmers when I began to relief milking for area farmers. In the past three years, I have had the experience of working in sub-zero temperatures, of milking cows while severely ill, and the experience of being kicked by cows. I have only milked in tie stall barns and have not had the experience of milking in a parlor. In addition, what I do not
have a true appreciation of is having children, working with a spouse on a daily basis, or the experience of feeling the financial stresses of farming.

I have not had extensive experience as a patron of agribusinesses, but as my beef operation expands, I have begun to patronize feed mills and equipment dealers more often. I was surprised when frequenting cooperatives or feed mills that I was always asked, “Will this be credited to your father’s account or your boyfriend’s account?” I think they were shocked when I said, “No. I am paying for this because it is for my business.” This is part of the reason I developed this thesis.

Agriculture became more than just a hobby or occupation, when I become involved in various agriculture leadership organizations. It became a passion. I have participated in 4-H, FFA, Delta Theta Sigma Little Sisters, the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, and the FFA Alumni. I felt agriculture leadership organizations can have a large impact on how people perceive their role in the industry. While working for the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, I observed many women in the industry and was always amazed by the amount of work they were responsible for, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Rain or shine, sick or healthy, these women are working to ensure the success of their operations. Dairy farm women are mothers, business women, farm managers, laborers, leaders, and wives. On a daily basis, these women are veterinarians, bookkeepers, financial planners, mechanics, and horticulturalists.

I have worked with many of the respondents of this study on a professional basis during my employment with the Wisconsin Farm Bureau
Soczka 42

Federation. Therefore, I may have a preconceived vision of them. Yet, I believe my past experiences have been a positive attribute rather than a detriment to the study. The participants may have been more likely to share a tour of their dairy facilities, their homes, and their personal feelings with someone they know, versus a complete stranger.

**Bracketing**

As a researcher, I have conjectured that participants have experienced some level of gender bias during their experience as a farm wife from agribusinesses, leadership organizations, or from people who have never lived on a farm. The bias would be exhibited in the form of verbal communication from these groups. The analyst anticipated participants would have specific examples, stories or memories of such occurrences to share. The researcher hypothesized that women on Wisconsin dairy farms have been experiencing more control over dairy management decisions, are being allowed more input on financial matters, and that many women are working off the farm for additional income. Lastly, the researcher believed that the roles of women on the mid-sized farms and large-sized farms would be different. These preconceived notions regarding the study were bracketed by the researcher in order to open the eyes of the analyst to the meanings attributed to the phenomenon by the women who had experienced it (Soczka, 1999).

The next section of this study will outline the methods of verifying a phenomenological study and limitations of this study. All research projects have strengths and weaknesses. Gaps or limitations to any method of analysis may
exist. By exposing these limitations, fellow scholars can fully contemplate the validity of the research project.

**Methods of Verification**

In qualitative research, validity is assessed according to the adequacy and completeness of the description. Validity is acquired if the researcher and the readers of the material agree that the descriptions and the explanations are credible (Keyton, 2001). The validity and reliability of the study is increased when the same conclusions are discovered using two or more methods (Keyton, 2001).

In the field of phenomenology, validity can be acquired in using a variety of approaches. The data can be submitted for confirmation to another researcher who reviews the data for identical patterns or themes (Creswell, 1998; Dukes, 1984). Secondly, an outside reader can identify the logic of the experience and how it corresponds with his or her own experience (Creswell, 1998; Dukes, 1984). The third and final verification process is used when the researcher shares their findings with the participants to allow them to provide feedback. The informants can verify the unified description of the experience and can provide the researcher with corrections (Moustakas, 1994).
Chapter Three

**Data Results**

This qualitative study was based on fourteen in-depth interviews with Wisconsin dairy farm women. The participants were asked a series of questions relating to their current gendered experiences as dairy farm wives. These questions can be found in Appendix A. The first portion of the results section is a description of the demographic data that was acquired. The demographic data provided by the participants will assist fellow scholars in comparing, contrasting, and finding similarities among the experiences of the participants. The information is essential for evaluating the pool of participants. In addition, this segment will illustrate any noticeable differences between the large-sized and mid-sized cohort dairy farms.

The last section in the subsequent chapter will explore the data that was gathered from the interviews. After delimitating the data, as prescribed by Patton (2002), the researcher eliminated irrelevant, repetitive or overlapping data. The next step in the process was to take the significant statements and group them into meaningful themes. The results section is comprised of the significant information obtained in the form of themes and sub themes. After exploring both the demographic and thematic information, the thesis will then make sense of the information in the analysis chapter.

**Demographic Data**

Table 1 represents the data collected concerning the demographic characteristics of the sample participants that are currently milking under 100
dairy cows. In the mid-sized cohort, the participant’s ages ranged from 27 to 38 years of age, with the average mean age being 35.3 years old. The average number of years the participants have been farming is 11 years. Only three of the seven participants in the mid-sized farm cohort grew up on a farm. The other four participants married into the dairy farm operation. The average number of children in this unit is 2.7 children and the average age of their children is 7.4 years of age.

One of the seven (1 of 7) farms in the mid-sized farm cohort presently use rotational grazing practices and are currently producing certified organic milk. Two of the seven farms (2 of 7) are in the process of becoming certified organic in order to increase the premiums paid for their milk. All seven of the farms have Holstein dairy cattle and only one of the seven has a significant amount of Jerseys on their farm.

Table 1  Participants milking under 100 cows, Mid-Sized Farm Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Yrs. Farming</th>
<th>Number of Cows</th>
<th>Tillable Acres</th>
<th>Milking Parlor</th>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
<th>Other Income</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reba</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>W &amp; H</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>W &amp; H</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Participants milking 100 to 500 cows, Large-Sized Farm Cohort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Yrs. Farming</th>
<th>Number of Cows</th>
<th>Tillable Acres</th>
<th>Milking Parlor</th>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
<th>Other Income</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tania</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the participants interviewed were given pseudonym names to maintain their anonymity. W = Wife contributes additional income to family, H = Husband contributes additional income to family, W & H = Both husband and wife contribute additional income to the family. Part-time employees were not included in the employee column.

Table 2 represents the data collected concerning the demographic characteristics of the sample participants that are currently milking between, 100 to 500 cows. In the large-sized cohort, the participant’s ages ranged from 30 to 39 years of age, with the average mean age being 33.7 years old. The average number of years the participants have been farming is 10.9 years. Unlike the mid-sized group, six of the seven (6 of 7) participants in the large-sized farm cohort grew up on a farm. Only one of participants married into the dairy farm operation. The average number of children in this unit is 2.6 children and the average age of their children is 14.9 years of age. None of the mid-sized farms listed have any full-time employees on the farm.

Three of the seven (3 of 7) large-sized farms milk Jersey cows, while the other four farms primarily milk Holstein dairy cattle. None of the farms in the large-sized category are certified organic producers. Three of the seven (3 of 7) mid-sized farm wives said they had children that helped or family members that assisted them during the summer. The large-sized cohort dairy farms all have more than one hired employee. Two of the seven (2 of 7) farm wives in the large-sized group stated that they also had part-time employees, in addition to their full-
time help. Linda’s farm has four part-time employees and Karlene’s farm has fourteen part-time employees.

When examining the information obtained from Wisconsin dairy farm women, little difference was exhibited between the mid-sized and large-sized cohort of participants. No major differences between the two groups were observed in the Identity and Gender Acceptance themes. Since the divergence of farm size is a relatively new phenomenon, their identities, values, and experiences in society are still the same. Perhaps, social differences will emerge in the future as the size of farms continues to become more diversified in scale and products.

The differences that were explicit were largely contained to the roles and responsibilities on modern dairy farms. The large-sized cohort was more mechanized and relied heavily on hired labor. Thus, the work women participated in on the large-sized farms was less physical in nature, yet their gendered experiences and identities were virtually indecipherable from those from the mid-sized cohort of women. The positions of women on large-sized farms are more specialized. Vogt et al. (2001) also found that women on large-scale confinement farms tended to focus on tasks like bookkeeping, employee records, and managing the calf or heifer barns (p. 12). The study found that women were seldom involved in fieldwork, although several of the women said that they used to do these tasks when their farms were smaller (Vogt et al., 2001). Even though their positions were more specialized, the women on the large-scale confinement farms appear to spend comparable amounts of time on farm-related work as women on conventional farms (Vogt et al., 2001). The women on the large-sized
farms are as important to the operation as those women working on the mid-sized farms, even if the type of tasks they complete are different.

**Themes**

This qualitative inquiry was based on fourteen interviews of dairy farm wives, who are in partnership with their husbands on Wisconsin dairy farms. The literature review concluded that economic, technological, and social influences are transforming the roles that women occupy on dairy farms. This review of the literature has assisted in speculating on what types of new roles women are fulfilling and why they are performing these new tasks on modern dairy facilities.

When encountering social change, many transformations are met with adversity. Are these new gendered roles being met with any adversity or are they being met with encouragement? Therefore, how do dairy farm women in partnership with their spouses communicate their gendered experiences on Wisconsin farms in the 21st century? Secondly, how do agribusinesses and agriculture leadership organizations communicate to dairy farm women, in partnership with their spouses, their gendered experiences on Wisconsin farms in the 21st century? The subsequent portion of this thesis outlines the themes and sub themes that were discovered throughout the descriptions provided by the participants.

The experiences of each dairy farm women are unique, yet several common themes appeared between the informants’ responses. The results section is clustered into three main themes. The first portion discusses the responses that revolve around the dairy farm women’s identities. The second theme depicts the
current roles and responsibilities of dairy farm wives on Wisconsin farms. The third and final theme illustrates the extracted answers that surround the issue of gender acceptance in the agriculture community.

There are several sub themes that surfaced in these three clusters. When compiling the themes, the number eleven out of fourteen (11 of 14) appears five times. The number represents the number of participants that expressed the same thematic answers to the interviewer’s questions. The number may be the same, but the respondents who answered were not the same. In each case, the three wives who did not agree with the clustered answered were different. The same is true for the four times that the number ten out of fourteen (10 of 14) emerges.

Refer to table 3 for a listing of the themes and the sub themes that were expressed.

Table 3  Themes and Sub Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Joy derived from occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with spouse/Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raising children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with animals/Being outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Income fluctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-farm women are surprised or shocked/Impressed by amount of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-farm men are surprised, shocked, or amazed/Don’t know anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misconceptions and stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
<td>Caring for animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mechanics and fieldwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bookkeeping and paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Child rearing and housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intergenerational similarities and differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Acceptance</td>
<td>Acceptance in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance from agribusinesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equipment dealers and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance in leadership organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following results section includes a description of the themes and quotes from the study’s participants to further validate the clusters.

**Identity**

Humans continually work to define themselves and understand the world around them. In the process of trying to comprehend their own identities, human beings associate themselves with others in the form of groups based on the traits they exhibit. According to Hollander and Howard (2000):

Identity typically refers to the more public aspects of self. Identities locate a person in a social space by virtue of the relationships and memberships these identities imply. Thus we hold identities based on memberships in social groups (both vocally and ascribed) and on the character traits we enact in interaction and that others attribute to us (p. 94).

The participants of this study associate themselves with the agriculture community and more specifically, they identify themselves as dairy farm wives. The dairy farm wives not only ascribe to this group, but other people they communicate with, attribute their character traits with those of the agriculture community. The theme, identity, will discuss the traits dairy farm women associate with their group and will finish with the attributions others associate with a dairy farm woman.

The dairy farm wives in this study depicted their identities as dairy farm wives in their responses to several of the researcher’s questions. The women articulated what it was like to be a dairy farm wife by recounting the advantages and disadvantages of the position. When asked what it was like to be a farmer,
the participants identified positively with their occupation as a farmer. Twelve out of fourteen (12 of 14) informants replied that they enjoyed being a farmer. Tina stated, “I always say I’m a dairy farmer and I am proud that is what I do.” Carol said, “I guess what I say to people is that we enjoy it, we still want to do it, but it’s a business.” “Good, I think. I wouldn’t want to be anything else,” said Kathy. Jean stated, “But, I never thought I’d be doing what I do and I really have fallen into it, but enjoy it immensely. I can’t imagine not milking and working with my parents.” The respondents were proud of what they do and could not imagine being anything else.

As small or large business owners, dairy farm women appreciate the additional time they can spend with their families because they are able to work at home. Eleven of the fourteen (11 of 14) dairy farm wives felt that they enjoyed farming because it allowed them to work side by side with their husbands and family. Family has traditionally been the key to the survival of the farm and the value of family has been passed down through the generations. Tina stated:

I guess that fact that you get to work with your spouse. Some people can’t work with their spouses, but my husband and I do get along pretty well. We do have a lot of discussions in the barn, so we do have a lot of communication with each other, so that’s nice.

Amanda said, “I love being able to be here for my kids, you know, instead of going off to a 9:00 to 5:00 job or whatever.” Reba felt, “It’s something that my husband and I can do together. If we were both punching a clock someplace else, you couldn’t do that.” Carol said, “Well, I like being able to work side-by-side
with my husband, and I like having that where we both make decisions together, whether it's with the farm or with our family.” Not only do they enjoy working with their husbands, but they value the additional time they are able spend raising their children.

A sub theme of the pleasure the women articulated about working with their family, is raising their children on a farm. The dairy farm women in this study believe it is advantageous to be able to raise their children at home versus hiring daycare. The women like being able to stay home and raise their children on the farm. Eleven out of fourteen (11 of 14) participants continually expressed the benefits of raising children on the farm. Tania stated:

When we had less cows, you had more time, but you can't, you have to get out and get a job or something and then the kids are being raised by either a babysitter or a daycare, and that's not really... Really the way I want to raise my kids.

Natalie commented that she has told other women the following:

A lot of them will actually give me credit, because they know, if they know the work involved in farming, you know. But, then, I turn around and say, “Where else can you raise your kids? Where else can you be a part of your family all the time.”

Tina added:

You can have your kids in the barn with you. They are at work with you, which is nice to be able to raise your family on the farm. Our kids are in the barn all the time and, if they're not in the barn, they're just right up in
the house, you can run up and check on them. If you have a regular job, you can’t bring your kids with you. They’re on their big wheels. The cows are used to them being there, and they’ve been in there since they were two weeks old, so the kids are used to the cows and you’re always still watching out for them making sure they’re not getting kicked or hit or pushed, but it’s nice that way, that it’s a family part.

Jean conjectured, “You don’t have to worry about day care and you can still make some money, but you don’t have to worry about who’s watching your kids.”

Later in the interview, Jean, reiterated this sentiment in the following manner:

I get to be here when my kids get off the bus and I love that. Or, next Tuesday, they’re going to go ice-skating at the fair grounds, and I get to chaperone, because I don’t have to worry about asking off for work. You know, I switch my chores around, and they’ll still be there when I get home. I have that flexibility. When you’re a business owner that helps a lot, so I like that, I love that that I can be there.

Carol provided another benefit to raising their children on the farm. Carol said, “I like that our kids have learned to grow up with responsibility, and I enjoy the cattle, so I think for them too, having the horses and being outside and things like that.” Carol also added that, “They’ve shared hard work and they share a lot of fun too.” The dairy farm wives felt that they could teach their children valuable lessons on farms. The dairy farm mothers can teach their children about the importance of family and working hard.
The informants went a step further to describe what it was that they loved about their occupations. Another theme that emerged when discussing why the participants like being farmers was that the women derived gratification from working with animals and being outdoors. Eleven out of fourteen (11 of 14) dairy farm wives felt that they liked working with the animals. Linda retorted:

Well, I really like cows. I just really think that they're about the most interesting creature that there is, and the productivity of cattle, especially dairy animals is just amazing to me. And I love the challenge of fine-tuning everything for them so that they can produce at that extremely high level. There is nothing more exciting to than walking in my parlor and seeing 18 cows with their rear udders just, so stretched and their dripping because they're so full of milk. I mean, that’s what I wait for is for the cows to be so full that it’s like, we’re doing it. You know, this is good. Melissa enjoys, “Being with the animals and I like driving tractor and doing the field work, because, you know, we are making a product.” “I love the fields, the trees, and the animals,” stated Kathy. Amanda agreed with her counterparts saying, “I like working with the cattle.” Clearly, the informants derived joy from animal husbandry and being able to work outdoors.

One of the major reasons women enjoy dairy farming is because as independent business owners they can set their own hours. Nine out of fourteen (9 of 14) participants love working independently and having the freedom to set their own hours. Many of the women articulated that they could not imagine doing any other type of job. Kelly stated, “I enjoy being my own boss.” Reba
replied, “You can set your own schedule, you know. If there’s a meeting or something you want to go to, you can rearrange your schedule and go to the meeting or whatever, and this schedule is more flexible.” Tina also agreed when she said, “You are your own boss. You get to do what you like and what time you like to do it. Nobody’s there telling you, you have to be there at a certain time.” Tara felt:

It is nice in a way, because if you want to take a few hours off to go do something, because of something, some family thing, it is quite flexible, but yet again, it’s very rigid, because of the feeding calves, and all of that.

Even though the women in the study believed they had more freedom to be their own bosses and set their own schedules, the women also admitted that the long hours they work is a disadvantage to their occupations. Eleven out of fourteen women (11 of 14) felt they disliked the long hours associated with being a dairy farmer. Dairy farmers’ schedules revolve around the weather, the seasons, and their daily chores. The cows have to be milked every twelve hours, three hundred and sixty five days of the year. The calves, heifers, and cows have to be fed, cleaned, and bedded every day as well. The flexibility that does exist is rather limited. Amanda remarked, “The hours and the pay. It’s not that, you know, we don’t mind putting in the long hours, it’s just when it’s day in, day out, day in, day out, and it’s like for what.” Tania stated:

I’d like more time off. But we are trying to do that too. We try to go out one night a week, or month, kind of a thing and get two guys to help milk during that time. We’re trying to do that now with some help.
Melissa felt:

   Probably the long hours, which would be more Rick than me, but you
   know, when we chop, we have to chop when the sun is shining. If it's
   raining for three days and it's nice on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, you
   work, which isn't a problem, because we're all family, and we do it
   together.

Carol replied:

   I think that it's harder on a family at times, because we do get less
   vacation time, you know, I don't have Saturday and Sunday off, per se,
   and so there are Saturdays when we are outside all day long, and then, that
   kind of takes a toll at times, too.

Karlene answered:

   Sometimes the long days just....You know, you're going to have them, but
   you hear people doing, "Oh, I'm doing this, this weekend. I'm doing that."
   We do have a chance to get away. I mean, we're fortunate with the
   amount of help we have with the family that we have that we can get away,
   but it's just sometimes, you're always like, "Oh, what's the grass like on
   the other side of the fence sometimes."

Three of the fourteen (3 of 14) participants did not grow up on dairy farms and
married into the business. Natalie, who did not grow up on a dairy farm, made
the comparison of her life before farming and her life now as a dairy farm wife.
"Disadvantages are the seven days a week. I mean, where I worked before, I had
every weekend off," Natalie continued, "Seven days a week, long hours. You
know, I just think, I think that it's not a glamorous job, getting pooped on, kicked, I mean, it's just not glamorous.

The second disadvantage to being a dairy farm wife was the experience of not having control over their income. Farming is a risky business and the income of a dairy farmer can fluctuate rapidly. The incomes' of dairy farm families depends on numerous factors including herd health, weather, and markets. Five of the fourteen (5 of 14) dairy farm wives were frustrated by the lack of money and the uncontrollable nature of their business. Money often goes back into the business first, thus less money is spent on the house, their children, or on themselves. Tara was not shy about her frustration. She exclaimed:

Money! Not having any money. My biggest pet peeve is everything goes for the farm and something could be broke a month or a year in the house or whatever and, until you get raggy, it doesn't get fixed or you go without, because it's not going to make you money. And that's, oh, that's not going to make me money. But, many people who go to work don't have to worry about those things. This is our business, and it's our home and a lot of times, if you're short money, it goes to the farm, not to the family. And we don't really pay ourselves like other businesses give themselves, because I think we would end up putting that money right back into it. My kids are not starving and they're not wearing rags or nothing, but I think that really has a big toll on everybody. Just, what happens when the milk price is down. Everyone is stressed and we don't have money to pay these bills. You're trying to cut on feed or whatever, but you don't want to
So I think that’s the biggest problem. There’s no consistency.

Karlene described the risky nature of the business when she said:

Just milk prices are never the same. It’s just a gamble. Whereas, when you go to your job and anywhere else, it’s like you’re, 9:00 to 5:00. You know it’s there, and the income is always going to be there.

Carol realizes that farming is tough and remarked:

There are things we would, probably, like to have change. I mean, the economy is very tough in farming. And so financially it gets frustrating. It gets very burdensome where you’re trying to figure out how you’re going to pay for things, because everything else if it’s breaking, or whatever, is on the high end and your incomes on the low end, so that it makes things very challenging. I mean….we, my husband…does like, I said, all of the bookwork, but we discuss finances all the time, and we are both aware of where our bottom line is. That is frustrating.

A person’s identity can also be defined by the way a person associates themselves with his or her own gender, race, or ethnic affiliation. People may highly identify with membership to these groups concurrently by ascribing to their traditions, roles, and values. Dairy farm women ascribe to the agriculture community and their roles on the farm. Non-farm women and men may also associate them with the agriculture community because farm women exhibit their membership to the group by adhering to the agriculture community’s roles, traditions, and values. Identity can be also formed in a human’s reality through a
person’s perception of the judgment of others (Wood, 1994). People perceive what others think of them. Going one step further, communication assists in facilitating these perceptions.

The following themes and descriptions revolve around what it is that other women outside of farming say to dairy farm women about their occupations. Participants were asked the question, “When you are talking to a woman and she discovers that you are a woman who is farming, what is her reaction?” Ten of the fourteen (10 of 14) dairy farm wives stated that other women were surprised or shocked to find out they were farmers. The respondents felt that women were more inquisitive about the positions that dairy farm women held on modern farms. Ten of the fourteen (10 of 14) informants also said that the non-farm women were impressed by the amount of hard work a dairy farm wife was responsible for completing. Many of the non-farm women the participants talked to showed genuine interest in their occupation and had a greater understanding of the amount of work the women were responsible for. Amanda described her experience by stating:

A lot of times it’s, when you talk to them and they gain the understanding, because they’re a woman, they’re a mom, the same as you are, but then, when you can talk to them on a personal level, get to know them and you can talk about the things that you all do, and I think they’re quicker than men. There’s a huge appreciation and “Wow, I could never do that. I could never do what you do.” So I think it’s different talking with other women. They’re more apt to understand and appreciate what you do,
because they deal with everything you deal with: being a wife, being a mom, whatever. It's like they could work and have a full-time job, or whatever, but then they learn that you have this job that you never walk away from. There is no time off. And I think that blows a lot of women away. Just that they have that understanding of what it is to be female and, when they learn of all that extra stuff that you do, they're blown away, like, "Wow, I could never do what you do." I've heard that a lot from other moms, other women. Versus, I think some men look at you like, "Yeah, sure." It's like, "No, come on now. You put on some boots and follow me around for the day, Mr. Banker." It's like, "I could drive your garbage truck. Can you come do what I do?"

Kelly said:

Well, I get, "Wow, you can do all that?" I get a lot of that. Because, "You have four children and you farm?" They're actually probably more amazed than any other guy. And never underestimate like whoa, they must assume that my job is really hard, whereas a guy would think that I'm not taking an active part in underestimating what I can do.

Melissa remarked:

"Wow, that must be really hard. There's a lot of work involved. How do you get the kids here and there and stay involved in everything?" Because we're involved in a lot of different agriculture associations and leadership organizations. How do you do everything and keep the house clean? And how you find time for everything?
Linda believed:

Generally, it's like shock. They're more open about showing that and then like genuine interest is usually what I get, and, you know, a lot of questions about, "Oh, why did you decide to do that? Did you grow up on a farm?" and just sort of like really exploring, you know, kind of the circumstances that led to it, because they know it's rare, and they know that they don't have to pretend like it's not.

All of the participants (14 of 14) in this study have children and this was a common responsibility that other non-farming women could relate to. The participants believed the non-farm women had a greater appreciation for their jobs, than that of men, because they could relate to each other as mothers. The participants also shared another commonality, their gender, which made it easier for the women to relate to each other.

In addition, one's identity can be shaped by the opposite gender. Communicating with the opposite sex can assist in defining one's self. When participants were asked, "When you are talking to a man and he discovers that you are a woman who is farming, what is his reaction?" Six of the fourteen (6 of 14) respondents said that the men they conversed with were surprised, shocked or amazed. Natalie stated:

"You farm? No way do you farm." They're surprised and, to be honest with you, I'm surprised, too. If you would’ve asked me 10 years ago, if I would ever farm or marry a farmer, my answer would be "No." So, I think a lot of people are surprised. I think actually a lot of men still think
of not women being in the farming role. I think that everyone thinks the men should farm, not the women, and I think it’s turning. I mean, you see so many more women, even in newspaper articles. There’s so many coming into agriculture, whether it be banking or any role in farming, so I guess they shouldn’t be surprised, but I think they are surprised.

Tania recalled, “They’re just surprised. They are like “Really?! Or like...ah...man. Well, he couldn't believe that I was farming, that's the thing. He ended up breaking up with me, because I was a farmer.” Jean added:

Amazement. Really, I play volleyball with some friends and they’re always asking questions. I was telling them about the C-section, because I went to play volleyball last night and they’re like, “Wow, and you did what with a cow?” and you know, they just, I think they think it’s such a physical job that they wouldn’t envision that a woman could handle it.

Linda is the general manager of her 275 cow dairy farm. Many men are especially surprised to find out that she is making the nutrition, veterinary, and daily management decisions. Her husband works off the farm full time. Her husband tells the employees when they are hired that Linda is the boss, not him.

Linda provided this illustration regarding her experience:

The first time I ever really remember anyone’s reaction was at a farm organization annual meeting, and I started farming in October and that would have been the beginning of December. Another co-worker of mine from my off farm job says, “So, how’s farming, Linda? It’s only been a couple of months, you know. Is it great? Is it everything you thought?”
and I said, “Yeah. You know, it’s good so far, dah to dah.” And this other guy at the table says, “Oh, did you just get married?” And I just was, “Oh my gosh!” and I said, “Well, no.” And actually Abbey, my co-worker said, “Well, no, they just bought a farm.” It was like the total assumption that the only way a woman could start farming is to marry a man who has the farm. And that was just like, “Oh, Christ,” you know. You know, come on, it’s possible. There’s nothing wrong with it. So that’s my first time I remember that. Mostly, they’re kind of like, “Oh, OK.” Sort of like, not shocked, but more like kind of a little bit of disbelief. Like they’re, “Oh” and that you could just tell that they totally wonder more. They wonder if I really do make the decisions or if my husband really does make the decisions. You can tell the wheels are turning, but they generally don’t ask more questions. If they do, it’s the general, “How many cows do you milk? How many times a day do you milk?” And sometimes, then, they’ll say, I’ll say, “Oh, 275.” and they’re like, “Oh, my gosh, you must have employees.” “Yes, I don’t milk them all myself. Hello.” But, it’s funny to me because, if it was a man they were asking that question to, I don’t know if they’d say, “You must have employees.” They assume that he does, but they wouldn’t say, “Oh, my gosh, you must have employees.” So, it’s kind of funny.

There are many women that are sole operators of their own dairy farms, but the phenomenon is still rare. Many men underestimate the amount of work and
equality that occurs on Wisconsin farms. Some of the respondents felt that men underestimated their involvement in the business side of farming.

The other response women encountered was a bit more negative. Six of the fourteen respondents (6 of 14) were given the impression from men that as a dairy farm wife they did not know anything about farming. These six women felt the men they were talking to assumed that only their husbands ran the business and they were unknowledgeable about the farming operation. The wives felt that many men did not listen to them or did not acknowledge their participation in the business. Melissa said:

They usually think that I don’t know anything and I find that more like, because I do more of like the bill aspects, so if I call with a question on the bill, they think I don’t know anything about. Some of it, I don’t, of course, but a lot of it, I do. That’s the first thing they think of, since I’m a woman, I don’t know anything. Just like when you get your oil changed or whatever, and they try to tell you there’s parts wrong with the car or whatever.

Tara answered:

The first question that every woman gets, “Oh, do you milk?” and then, if you don’t milk, then they said, “Oh, you must feed calves or something.” They treat you like you don’t do anything or know anything about it. And, no, I may not milk the cows. I do know they need to be milked. I do know what has to go into doing that. Not that I’m doing it, so I guess I’m more of a manager, in that area. But some people don’t look up to me,
because they don’t think I do the work, per se, you know the physical work.

Karlene described the following situation:

They look at you differently. But, case in point, we were at a class reunion and everyone’s talking. I’m home at the farm and they’re like, “Oh.” You just get the feeling like they’re 2 or 3 steps ahead of you and you’re just a stay at home mom and you milk cows. I don’t want to call it degrading, but I don’t know how else to word it. It’s just not, and the fact that I quit college after 2 years, because I met my husband and I knew what I was getting into and I didn’t finish a degree. They just kind of look at you like you don’t know what you’re doing, and that kind of stuff.

Lastly, Kathy explained:

It depends who it is. There have been nutritionists and people who sell stuff to us or do work with us. Once they see and know that I actually do know what I’m talking about and that I do, do things, that I don’t just sit here, then, I think, they have some respect. They look at me when they talk to me. When my husband and I are there and they’re asking how the cows are doing and how the fresh cows are doing, they look at me, like I do have a knowledgeable input. The men who don’t know that I do work and do know what I’m talking about, they don’t even look at me. You know, I’m 30 now, so we’re passed the “You’re too young to not know anything.”

The women expounded on this theme by saying that the males outside of
agriculture were uninformed about their role in the operation and misconceptions exist about their roles on the farm. The perception of the dairy farm women is that non-farm males exhibited stereotypical beliefs regarding the roles that women played on the farm.

Not only did the participants feel that men did not understand their occupation fully, but non-farm women also had misconceptions. Seven of the fourteen (7 of 14) women believed that both men and women outside of the industry are misinformed about their roles as dairy farm wives. Reba shared this experience:

A lot of people I went to school with or something, you know, “Oh, Reba, you were so smart, why didn’t you go to college? Why are you just farming?” I mean, there, yeah, I would have to say there’s still quite a bit of that out there. And, the stereotype, well you’re just a farm wife. They don’t realize, you know, this is a business and the role I have on the farm, so I think there’s still kind of a misconception there.

Jean described:

I went down in August, they had a Department of Natural Resources hearing for some rules that were coming up in changing the manure storage, and we talked about manure storage being an issue, and the leadership organization said, “This is something that is definitely going to affect you if they change the rules, and you should go and testify on how it would impact you.” I went with Lindsey, and we ended up waiting all day to testify, and we were the last two to go. Finally, at 4:00 o’clock, we
talked about our farming operations and how, yes, they would impact us and we’re a family still very much so, and the legislators said, “You know, you two are just not the stereotypical farmer that I had envisioned, you know, in dealing with.” Good. That’s why we’re here, because we are what is up and coming. But, you still go to so many farm meetings where there are not a lot of women. I went to a meeting the other day about milk quality and there were only two girls that were even present and one was, they, milked 400 cows, and their daughter, too. You definitely stand out, and you get lots of attention, which is probably not necessarily bad.

Carol recalled:

I just retired actually, but for 26 years, I was on the National Ski Patrol, and we have a ski hill about 5 miles from here, and there were quite a few people for years and especially as newer people came on, who didn’t know we dairy farmed, and they were very surprised, because I think, we don’t fall into what the stereotypical dairy farmer looks like or smells. But, when we leave the farm, I don’t know that people would necessarily guess what we do. So, I haven’t had it be a positive or a negative thing. Just maybe surprised.

Tara shared the subsequent stereotype:

Overall, I think most men when they see a woman and they don’t think they do much that way. Because mostly farmers were men, because it was more physical, and I think that’s why they have that stereotype. And I think a lot of times what happened is, for example, in my husband’s
family, his mother milked until they put the pipeline in. His father did not milk, he couldn’t physically. She would come in and, then because they had older kids, they had breakfast and stuff; but then, she stayed in the house and did the house stuff. And in that family, that stereotype of the women does the house stuff and the men do the barn stuff is how it was because they had such big families. Now, I think that’s changing, because there are only 2-3 children per average of families now. I mean, my daughters out there riding pigs just like my sons, that way. But I think that has a lot to do with, but it’s still . . .

Natalie talked about the stereotype that she used to hold before she got married and moved to a farm. She remembered:

I think I have stereotyped against farmers, not just women, in the past. I mean, for example, going into Fleet Farm, a lot of the farmers don’t shower, and I can see where the general public can get this idea of women farmers. I mean, but to look at me, and say, “Oh, no, she can’t farm. She doesn’t look like a farmer.” and I think that’s wrong.

Stereotypes and generalizations exist in a variety of settings. Dairy farm women are no exception. As less and less people grow up on dairy farms in Wisconsin, these stereotypes will only perpetuate themselves. Dairy farm women will need to become advocates and continue to be proactive about describing their true identities in order to dispel the myths.

In the past fifty years, technology and economics has drastically changed the way that humans operate their farm businesses. Dairy farming in Wisconsin
has also grown and evolved with the assistance of technology. Therefore, the roles, tasks, and responsibilities for dairy farm wives have simultaneously progressed. The next portion of the results section portrays the responses that depict the dairy farm wives' roles and responsibilities on modern farms.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Just as no two snowflakes are alike, no two dairy farm operations are exactly the same. Each farmer has his or her own unique way of dairy farming, yet many of the primary roles and responsibilities remain the same. The number of cows may differ, but the basic process of extracting the milk for dairy products is similar. The five sub themes clustered in this category include: caring for animals, mechanics and fieldwork, bookkeeping and paperwork, child rearing and housework, and intergenerational similarities and differences.

In order to grasp the participants' roles on their dairy farm operations, the researcher participated in a short tour of the informants' dairy facilities. The farm tour was utilized for two principle reasons. The first rationale was to acquire data relating to the dairy farm wives' primary responsibilities on the farm. The second reason for the tour was to assist in triggering the memory of the participant about which tasks they are responsible for. The researcher took extensive field notes and asked the participants to walk the researcher through a typical day on their farms. This technique was used to flesh out important information on the types of tasks women are responsible for on Wisconsin dairy farms. Therefore, the following section will describe the themes that were found during the tours. Any
verbatim quotes that are used in this section were acquired during the audiotaped portion of the interview and not during the tour.

The first theme that surfaced centered on the care of animals. Seven of the fourteen (7 of 14) women were in charge of or assisted with the job of milking cows. Milking cows includes a variety of tasks. Depending on the type of milking system, the details surrounding the primary tasks may vary. Some dairy farmers have a milking parlor, while others have moveable milking units in a tie stall barn. Generally, the process of milking cows includes: setting up the milking system, washing the cows’ teats, attaching the milking unit, dipping the cows’ teats after removing the milking units, and cleaning the milking system at the end.

A small difference was noticed between the mid-sized and large-sized cohorts. On the mid-sized farms, four of the seven (4 of 7) women milk cows on a daily basis. Of the three women who do not milk cows, two of the mid-sized dairy farm women have four or more children. The other respondent has had back surgery and is no longer able to milk. In the mid-sized group, none of the dairy farms currently hire any employees, but instead rely only on family labor. As the number of cows increase on the farm, then so too does the need for additional employees.

Less women in the large-sized cohort milk cows on a daily basis because they have hired employees to complete this task. In the large-sized cohort, only two of the seven (2 of 7) wives milk cows on a regular basis. Of the two women, one woman milks the cows on a daily basis and the other milks the group of hospital cows. Hospital cows are the cows that are sick or have just had a calf.
All of the wives (7 of 7) in the large-sized cohort stated that they have hired employees on their farms. The dairy farm women in this category have an average of 4.6 full-time employees in their operations, which, assists in eliminating their need to milk cows. Although the women in the large-sized cohort are not milking cows on a full-time basis, four out of the seven (4 of 7) women said they help streamline the milking process by setting up the milking parlor before the hired employees arrive for the day. Only one respondent in the large-sized category did not set up the parlor or milk cows on a daily basis. In this instance, the women in the large-sized cohort are completing less physical labor and are completing a more specialized role, managing employees.

Before or after the cows are milked, many of the dairy farm women are entrusted with the task of caring for the calves. This job may include feeding milk replacer, water, grain, or hay to the calves. The job could also include cleaning the manure soaked bedding out of the pens and replacing it with clean bedding. Ten of the fourteen women (10 of 14) interviewed were in charge of caring for the calves on their farms. On the mid-sized farms, six of the seven women (6 of 7) were the principal care takers of the calves, whereas, only four of the seven (4 of 7) women on the large-sized farms routinely cared for the calves. On large-sized farms there are employees that can care for the calves versus the mid-size group that relies only on family labor.

The second theme is clustered around mechanical tasks and field work. Many dairy farms in Wisconsin still grow their own feed for their dairy cattle, which requires the operation of tractors and farming implements. Other farms
buy their feed from grain farmers or hire custom operators to complete their field work for them. Seven out of the fourteen (7 of 14) women stated that they did field work on their farms. Out of the seven who do not complete any field work, two stated they have hired employees to do the work, two participants said they hire custom operators, and the last three stated they did not drive tractors because they felt uncomfortable doing so.

The third theme is the responsibility of record keeping and paperwork. Eleven of fourteen (11 of 14) respondents stated that they were the primary record keepers. Many of the dairy farm women ordered feed, tracked the families' finances, registered the cattle, and completed the yearly taxes in this category. One of the contributing factors may be that eleven of the fourteen (11 of 14) participants stated that they have had at least two years of education past the high school level.

Another type of record keeping, called herd health, is associated with dairy farming. A veterinarian routinely visits dairy farms to assist in maintaining a healthy and productive herd of cattle. Herd health occurs when the dairy farmer and the veterinarian review the health of the herd. The veterinarian may give vaccinations, treat sick cows with antibiotics, or check the breeding cycles of the cattle. This visit creates paperwork for the farmer because he or she needs to document the breeding cycles, the vaccinations, and the instructions for treating sick cows. Eight of the fourteen (8 of 14) dairy farm women who were interviewed said they were responsible for herd health on the farm.
Three of the seven (3 of 7) dairy farm women from the mid-sized cohort said they were responsible for herd health and five of the seven (5 of 7) women in the large-sized cohort completed herd health. A researcher might speculate that on the larger farms a herdsman would be responsible for herd health paperwork, but the opposite appears to be true in this study. The dairy farm wife may be the one who keeps the records and meets with the veterinarian, but her husband or a hired herdsman may actually be the person responsible for administering the prescribed veterinary care. Only four of the fourteen (4 of 14) participants stated that they administered veterinary care to the herd.

The last theme includes the responsibilities of child rearing and caring for the house. All of the wives (14 of 14) said they were primarily responsible for raising the children. This included ensuring the children are being watched, fed, bathed, and clothed. For participants with older children, this includes ensuring their children are ready for school in the morning and greeting the children when they get off the bus. In addition, ten of the fourteen (10 of 14) women stated they were responsible for completing household chores. The women in the study were responsible for keeping the house clean, preparing the meals, and for lawn maintenance.

The dairy farm wives highly identified with the role of mother. The participants expounded on this idea by identifying with this role when intergenerational questions were asked. Dairy farm wives’ were asked, “How do you think your role as a woman in dairy farming is similar to what your mother’s role was?” Although only ten respondents grew up on dairy farms, three of the
other respondents observed their mother-in-laws’ roles on dairy farms. Only one respondent declined to answer because she did not have either experience.

Twelve of fourteen (12 of 13) said their roles as a mother and schedule keeper is similar to the role their mothers had. The dairy farm wives learned from their mothers how to be a mother. Marilyn expressed this sentiment when she said, “The cooking, the cleaning, the housework. Dad doesn’t do any of that and never has. She probably though makes more meat and potato-type meals and I hardly ever have potatoes. She has more, bigger, fancier.” Tina remarked, “We all have to take care of the kids. You can’t ignore them for too long. You are still doing the cooking and the cleaning.” Tara described:

We have to take care of the children the majority of the time. I think that’s definitely it. I always tell my husband, “You just leave the house. You don’t have to worry where the kids are, to get a babysitter or this or that. You just naturally walk out that door. I’m going outside now or whatever.” Now, it’s not so bad. The kids are older. They can come outside and go and play, but that whole thing is if I’m doing something, I have to find out where to put them. I think the house, taking care of the house is a majority, not that he doesn’t help me at all. But, I mean, I think the majority of cleaning the house, taking care of the kids, and making sure food is ready is the same as my mother’s and her mother’s. And the mother before that.

Karlene recalled:
I think the family aspect. She was always there, just as an example, she was always there when you get off the bus. She’s always there to make sure everything was going smooth in the house, and I think that’s the big similarity. We’re always home and always available to be there for the kids, and I know she had the stresses, like the stresses here too, like I stated before, it’s just on a different scale.

Bridget said, “The theme. The taking care of the kids, taking care of the animals, taking care of their home, that’s all the same. No matter when you’re a mother, you do pretty much the same things.” The role of mother is very prevalent in the lives of dairy farm women.

The participants felt that the role of childrearing and homemaker has remained unchanged from previous generations. Many women felt that it will continue to be a major responsibility for dairy farm wives in the future. Respondents were able to relate the experience of child rearing with their mothers’ and with other non-farm women. As dairy farm wives, the role of mother comprises a large portion of the participants’ identity.

The major difference that dairy farm women’s identified between the role of their mothers and themselves was the participants’ role in the decision making process. The current generation perceived that they have a higher level of involvement in the dairy operation. Seven of the thirteen (7 of 13) women believed that they had a more active role in the decision making process, than their mothers or mother-in-laws did, on modern dairy farms. The women expressed that their input was valued in the decision making process. Jean quoted:
Definitely, my role is different in that I have...we’re trying to make it more equal with the say, you know, if we were looking at buying a 100 acres of land and we looked at it yesterday and, before my dad and my brother would have just said, “This is what we’re going to do.”

Melissa stated:

Because when we are doing like the tax planning meeting at the end of the year, it is always my dad and I and most of the time my husband does once and awhile, but most of the time it is the 3 of us going into the year end tax meeting, which mom has never done.

Linda said:

My mom, she actually met my step dad, because she milked cows for him. That’s kind of how they met, and so she was always with the cows in sort of that milking, but never decision making, really, and then they got married, and she was a partner in the farm, and she always did the books and the IVs, because she was a nurse and nobody else on the farm knew how to do an IV. So, she would IV the cows. But that’s sort of it. She always had a full-time job or a part-time, you know, and taking care of the kids off the farm. And so, she, you know, was not involved in day-to-day management decisions.

Kelly expressed this opinion:

That decision making, though, has been a big difference, because I’m an equal partner in all the decisions, so I can’t complain like, why did he
spend $20,000 on a tractor I didn’t OK it, but I have to because, there is no $20,000.

Many of the women that replied to this question said that their mothers were less involved in the daily farm operations because their mothers worked off the farm or because they had several children to do the work for them.

Women are making more management decisions about their dairy operations and feel they are integral partners on their farms. The participants have more influence in the decision making process, yet are still maintaining their central role as a homemaker. As women are becoming influential business partners, how are agribusinesses and leadership organizations incorporating these new customers or leaders? The last theme in the data results section explores the responses participants gave in terms of their acceptance as female leaders in the agriculture community.

**Gender Acceptance**

As the literature review discussed, the field of agriculture has been historically dominated by men. With the shift in societal attitudes and the advancement of technology, the researcher wanted to find out if females were feeling more gender acceptance in their occupations as dairy farmers. Are the new roles dairy farm women are fulfill, such as bookkeeping, a welcome change or are they being met with adversity? What are their gendered experiences pertaining to the addition of their new responsibilities? The subsequent themes will ascertain the collective opinion of the dairy farm women participating in this study regarding their gendered experiences.
The overall belief of dairy farm women in this study is that they felt more accepted in the industry than previous generations. Ten of the fourteen (10 of 14) dairy farm women said that they feel more accepted in the industry. The other four out of the fourteen participants (4 of 14) stated that they felt indifferent about the question. These four women said they did not feel more or less accepted in the dairy industry than anyone else.

The following quotes disclose the beliefs held by the ten women who said they feel more accepted in the agriculture industry. Reba said, “I would definitely say more accepted, you know, and that it just takes time.” Carol remarked, “More. Like I said, I think women have just as much leadership and responsibility in agriculture now a days.” Melissa felt, “More. Because I think it’s just becoming more common that women are taking an active role.” Natalie stated:

I think as a whole, women are more accepted. Not just in this area, agriculture but, in all areas. I think that women have come such a long way and I think we have more independence, more freedom. I think they’re listening to women more than they ever used to. But, like I said, it’s not necessarily milking cows, but it could be an FFA officer.

The ten participants believed that both, farm women and women in general are more accepted in a society. The dairy farm women feel that they have more choices, more independence, and more freedom than previous generations of women. Many of the participants perceived that they have gained acceptance in the agriculture industry as time has gone on. The informants explained that they
know more people in the industry and that other people got to know who they were over time.

Agribusinesses, such as lending institutions, cooperatives, supply companies, equipment dealers, and machine shops, are critical components to the dairy industry. Women in agriculture are completing more and more transactions with these types of businesses. Twelve of the fourteen (12 of 14) dairy farm wives did not feel they were treated any differently when purchasing farm supplies from salesmen. These dairy farm wives did not feel they were treated any differently than male customers. Natalie said, “I mean not much different.” Kelly stated, “I don’t see much difference.” Nina, “I don’t feel, I guess, that they treat me any differently than if I was a man, because I usually have the information or I guess I’m not going in there.” Tara declared, “The same I think. I think the guys like it when the women come in and pick up parts, you know. They don’t care. They just treat you the same.” Finally, Karlene said, “I guess personally, I haven’t run into any negativity.”

Furthermore, many of the women interviewed stated that they did not have any issues because their husbands called ahead to order the parts. Many of the women tried to prevent feeling incompetent or unknowledgeable by calling ahead. By preordering, the farmer could make sure the part was in stock and that errors were avoided. Six of the fourteen (6 of 14) dairy farm wives had their husbands call ahead and order the items. The women stated that the business usually knew that they were coming into pick up and purchase the product. Melissa replied, “Most of the time, if I am doing that, my husband or Dad have called ahead, and
I’m just picking up whatever, so there’s really no issue because I am assuming that’s what they want.” Linda said:

I hardly ever, ever go into a place where….I don’t pick up parts generally speaking. Usually, my husband does. And, when I do, I’m just picking up something that’s already pre-ordered, and I don’t think, there’s any, like exchange or anything.

Jean expressed, “A lot of times, the guys will call and have it ready for you, so all you have to do is pick it up.” Tracy has her husband call ahead to avoid this situation:

That’s actually pretty good, because what happens is Mike, if it’s a part we need and he has to order it, I’ll say “Call it in and tell them I’m coming,” and they expect me to be there. I don’t think that’s a big deal. It’s when they look at me funny and they’ll say, “Well, is it this part or that part?” and I’ll be like, “I don’t know. This is what he told me.” That gets aggravating, because I don’t know. He doesn’t have the time to go, and I think that’s aggravating for them, but they know it’s not my fault a lot of times, so I end up with a part and I’ll say, “Find me something like this.”

Amanda conjectured:

It’s funny, because like if I have to go in for parts or something, a lot of times, Keith would have called first to make sure they have it in stock or whatever, so a lot of times, I’m just going in there with, “My husband called. I’m here to pick up.”
Another reason for not encountering male discrimination was provided when female respondents claimed the man at the counter knew who they were. Six of the fourteen (6 of 14) women commented that the salesman they worked with knew who they were. The agriculture community is a small, close-knit population. Many of the people who work at agribusinesses grew up on farms as children or are ex-farmers. The dairy farm couple had built a trustful relationship with the agriculture business therefore the women in the study perceived that no gender discrimination existed. Natalie replied, “At the Co-op they all know me, though, so I mean, I guess it’s no surprise.” Jean said, “See, we’re in a small town, so everybody knows everybody, so it’s probably not a big shock or change. My husband’s probably related to half of them.” Tara believed, “But all the places we go to, they all know that I come in and get parts or whatever, so that’s not a big deal.” Karlene stated:

We deal with John Deere in town, and they know that I am from (farm name) and they’re actually, there’s a couple of men that work down there. They know that I’m married to Dan, and they’ve always been very accommodating when I go in there. It’s never a problem.

Even though twelve of fourteen (12 of 14) dairy farm women did not feel discriminated against when they purchased farm supplies from men, yet, many of them noticed a difference in service when dealing with equipment dealers, mechanics, or in machine shops. Many of the respondents commented that then when mechanical equipment was involved the situation changed. Seven of the fourteen (7 of 14) participants believed that equipment dealers or machine shop
employees did not treat them as equal partners in the dairy operation. Many of
the dairy farm women admitted that they were not mechanically inclined, but that
as an equal partner in the dairy operation, they were an integral part of the
decision making process when purchasing mechanical equipment. The women
were frustrated by the lack of involvement on the part of the salesman. Reba told
this story:

Well, the big thing was with the skid loader when it was a Case dealer
came here and he was trying to sell us the Case skid loader. If anybody
knew anything about skid loaders, all the controls are very different,
where a Bobcat’s all foot controls, most other ones are hand or kind of joy
stick controls and that’s very different, and there’s nothing wrong, I mean
either machine is fine, it’s whatever you are used to and both Mike and I
have always been used to the Bobcat with the foot controls. So, when this
guy came, he was trying to convince Mike that the hand controls were
better and Mike was kind of thinking that and he was almost kind of ready
to make the deal and he’s like, “Well, I would like my wife to also test
drive it.” And this guy didn’t have the time of day for that and he was
very cold toward me. I got into it and I’m like, “Absolutely not. Let’s just
get a Bobcat and stay with that.” We talked about it and we did, and that
salesman has like never been back. I think that would be the one story we
always joke about. Later on, I heard the story, he’d say, “Yeah, if it
wasn’t for the darn farm wife, I would have been able to make the sale,
but she didn’t like the skid loader.” There are some things that way, or
like I said, a lot of salesman come in and say, “I have to talk to Mike. Where’s Mike?” Like our feed nutritionist and the ones we work very closely with. They know the roles we have in the operation, and there’s not an issue at all.

Linda expressed this feeling:

The whole equipment thing, I really think is different in my mind than dealing with my other vendors. So, most like the semen guys and the guys selling soap and acid, the parlor guys and the vet and, you know all of those, they I think, it’s no big deal. I really don’t think it’s a big deal to them at all. When it comes to the equipment stuff, if they come to the farm, they always ask for my husband, even though he’s not even the one who generally knows the information at all. So, I think there’s a real difference between the whole equipment and non-equipment, all the cow side stuff is no big deal. The equipment is the big deal, and they think I’m stupid, and I am when it comes to equipment. I really am, but I still have a say in the decisions based on it. Right? You know, it’s not my thing, and they have a ton of other guy farmers who it’s not their thing either.

Amanda told this story about her experience at a machine shop:

I have been in there quite a few times either dropping off motors or picking up motors or doing whatever, because unfortunately it seems that we have the farm that motors just die on us. We’re either fixing or replacing and, like I said, just last week one of the fans on the end of the barn, like one of the end stalls, the water froze on the drinking pump, so
water was squirting out at the fan, kicked out the motor. It was one of those deals where Keith, it's just a little one horse motor, but I don't pay much attention. It's like I know that, yes, the motors and the silo motors, those are pretty big heavy motors, but what's on the fan, sure it's small, but I don't stop and think and worry about this kind of thing. I'm just told to go stop at W&W and pick up the motor. I just walked in and I said, "My husband called this morning." and "Oh, Keith Smith. You're here to pick up the motor." Yes. So, I do the little transaction, and he's going in the back to get the motor. It's in a box, and he carries it out and sits it on the counter and is finishing up the paperwork and then he looks at me and says, "Would you like me to carry that out to your vehicle for you?" and I'm like "Oh, is it heavy?" I am just thinking like a silo unloader motor is, those are pretty heavy. He says, "Yeah, it's pretty heavy. I'll carry it for you." And it's like, he throws it in the back of the van. I come home, and it's like, Keith just happened to be walking out of the barn as I am driving in, so I stop, and he gets it out, you know, and takes it into the barn. And then, I don't know how it ever came about, but he's like, Keith kind of gave me shit like, however it came about that he found out this guy carried it out to the van for me. He's like, "What the hell is your problem?" Well, what? I didn't even know. I would have carried it, you know, no big deal. I'm just stopping and thinking, this guy at the motor shop, it's like "Who do you think I am? I can carry a 50 lb. motor." I'm not a delicate little girl that can't handle it. It's sort of, like I said, I'm sure
they don’t have a, you know, later on I said to Keith, “What the hell, do they not have a lot of women that come into these motor shops? Or what? You know.” But, it’s like, I don’t know, “Give me a little credit guy.”

Tara remembered this scenario:

Like if my husband says I have to talk to my wife, I think they, kind of like, they don’t really say anything, but they kind of give you that look like, “Don’t you make the decisions?” Kinda deal. You know, its like, “I can’t believe you’ve got to talk to her.” Especially, when it comes to money, I think a lot of the guys, men in the industry, even if they’re selling equipment or whatever, because we’ve had people, salesmen come in and I say, “We have no money” and they’ll try to talk to Mike and Mike is like “Did you not hear her, she says we don’t have the money.”

Finally, Carol relayed her belief of how agribusinesses have become more female friendly over time. Here Carol depicts her past and present experiences with equipment dealers:

Well, I would say things have changed in the 20 years that we’ve farmed together. My sister, Beverly, and I always joke that, in the early years, there was a couple of salesmen, one in particular, who couldn’t just get it through his head, and would come up, and he did it to both of us, and he would say, “Is the boss around?” and we would both kind of, we kind of joked because we’d say, “Yeah, you’re looking at one of them.” and he wouldn’t talk to us, and he would say, “Well, I’ll come back when Jack’s available or Robert’s available.” It kind of miffed you, you know, but it
kind of got to be a joke, too, because then we realized it was his stupidity, rather than our inability. Anyway, I think I have seen a really big change in that, especially this last 10 years, I will have feed salesmen just walk in and start conversing with me on what we’d like or what they think we’d like. Same with just any type of equipment salesman, because they know, like when we buy equipment, we bought a disk bine last year, I was the one who was asking more questions, because I did all the work in the field if something broke on it. We used to have a hay bine, so you know, sickle sections and things like that. Jack did it all to have it prepared but, if it broke while I was cutting, I fixed it. So, I had a lot of questions, and I think after just asking questions, they quit looking at just him and looked at both of us. I just think that has changed tremendously in the industry, that there are a lot more women in leadership roles in agriculture. A lot more women are making the financial decision right alongside with their husband, and I really don’t feel that at all anymore, compared to what I used to. So, in my opinion, that’s I mean, that was what it’s like to be a woman in a way, but I think maybe even compared to some other occupations, I think we’ve made great strides.

The dairy farm wives in this study were also asked, “How are you treated when you purchase farm supplies, if the person behind the counter is a woman?” All of the dairy farm wives (14 of 14) surveyed did not believe they were treated any differently when purchasing farm supplies from a female salesperson. Some of the women said that saleswomen were more likely to engage them in
conversation, than salesmen. The wives felt that the sales women were more likely to engage them in conversation because they had things in common related to their gender. Natalie felt, “The same. I have never been disrespected or questioned.” Bridget quoted, “Same thing. I don’t notice anything.” Tania stated, “I guess the same.” Kelly said:

Yeah, I don’t think I’m treated much differently. We just talk; maybe we have more in common. I think I’m always amazed at someone else who is in agribusiness that’s just as knowledgeable usually, like, I am like, wow.

Many dairy farm wives also commented that did not run into many female salespeople. If the wives did complete transactions with saleswomen, it was often at a big box store that sold farm items and the women were just picking up miscellaneous items.

Agriculture leadership organizations are a place where farmers can develop a social network, address concerns, learn important skills, and work together to make positive changes for their industry. Leadership organizations have become an integral part of the agriculture community. The women participating in this study were asked, “Are you treated any differently in a leadership organization when you are working with a man?” Eight of the fourteen (8 of 14) study participants did not observe any difference in their treatment from men in leadership organizations. The dairy farm women discussed the Dairy Business Association, the FFA, the 4-H, the Farm Bureau, and the Holstein Association in their answers. Tania said, “I don't think so. I never noticed it anyway. You know, if we were or not.” Tara thought, “I don’t have a problem.”
Bridget replied, “Well, I’m assuming if it’s something I’m there for in a leadership role, they expect I can handle what’s going on, and I don’t think I come across looking really stupid so they’re going to put me down.” Natalie recalled:

Actually, no, I don’t think that I am. I think that the positions have changed so drastically, and women are among every organization I’m in, every group. I feel they all pretty much listen to us, our opinions matter, I don’t really feel that there is any difference.

The other six out of the fourteen (6 of 14) participants believed the opposite: that men treated them differently in certain leadership organizations. Many of the respondents commented that it depended more on the individual and did not blame the entire organization for their actions. Jean observed:

Um-hm! Well, again, I live in a small town, well this is the way it has always been done and they’ve been there forever and they like being on the boards, so that’s just their life blood and if you come in and say, “Well, we could try something different.” Oh, No. Sometimes, too, they’re not dealing with my parents, they’re dealing with me and kind of expect you to fall into that role and it’s very frustrating. I think when my husband and I both came back from college and came back to this small town and we’re going to be involved and we’re going to do all this stuff, and we’ve really phased out it. Part of it is a function of having a family and being busy, too, but at the same time, you go, “I feel like I’m beating my head against
the wall. Yes, I believe in organization, but I don’t have time to sit here and make you guys want to update or improve or be active.”

Kelly replied, “And, also, they often times just assume that you want to be a secretary or assume that organizational part, even though I’m good at it, that doesn’t mean that’s what I want to do.” Tina relayed this experience:

They just have their ideas and they’re pretty set with it, and they don’t really like to listen to new ideas which is just too bad, because sometimes there’s a lot of good ideas out there that, if they’d open their minds a little more, so I guess in some respects, yeah, I guess I don’t want say I’m looked down upon but sometimes I don’t think that the women get their ideas out there because I think men think, that we don’t have good ideas or maybe they’re not willing to try something new as a woman.

One difference that women pointed out was that men were not as open to discussing and trying new ideas, as women were in organizations. One quality that the dairy farm women felt that other women exhibited in leadership organizations was the ability to consider new ideas. Women were more open to discussing and trying new ideas in organizations, than men.

When working in leadership organizations, many dairy farm wives work side by side with both men and women. Therefore, the researcher asked the informants about their experiences with other women. Dairy farm women were asked, “Are you treated any differently in a leadership organization with you are working with a woman?” Thirteen of the fourteen (13 of 14) informants stated that the other women in the organization did not treat them differently. Many of
the women felt that they were treated equally and that women exhibited enthusiasm for new ideas. Reba answered, "I think there is that pretty much equal respect there." "I don't think so," retorted Linda. Natalie said, "When working with a woman? No. No." Lastly, Bridget stated, "No, I think it is the same."

Several themes emerged throughout the interviews with dairy farm wives in Wisconsin. The dairy farm women in this study concluded during their responses that as females in the agriculture industry that there is more gender acceptance than in the past. Overall, the dairy farm women believe agribusinesses and leadership organizations treated the women as equals. Many of the women felt that if they did encounter any issues it was because of an individual versus an entire sector of society. The only group that the women meet any resistance from was when they were working with equipment dealers or mechanics. Some women also divulged that they had minor problems with men in leadership organizations.

The dairy farm women offered priceless information while discussing the role of women in Wisconsin's dairy industry. Women on dairy farms in Wisconsin enjoy their jobs, working with their families, and caring for the animals. The women in this study also described the long hours and unstable income as a clear disadvantage to being a dairy farmer. Respondents described their perceptions of how non-farm men and non-farm women viewed their roles on dairy farms. Many misconceptions exist about their daily activities on Wisconsin farms. The participants then talked about what they do on a day-to-day basis. A full job description was extracted. Lastly, the informants explained
their perceptions of how agribusinesses and leadership organizations have become more accepting of dairy farm women than in the past.
Chapter Four

**Analysis**

The dairy farm women in this study answered the researcher’s questions to the best of their ability about who they are, what they do, and how they believe others perceive their lives. The subsequent chapter will discuss and make sense of the themed responses of Wisconsin dairy farm women. Modern dairy farm women in Wisconsin in partnership with their spouses, communicate their gendered experiences in several ways.

Wisconsin dairy farm women are dynamic, engaging, women who are mothers, farmers, and leaders in the industry. After reviewing the results, life on farms in Wisconsin has not changed as drastically as one is led to believe. The largest evidence for change in roles on dairy farms has occurred due to size and scale of the operation. The roles women perform may vary depending on the size of their operation, but the number of hours women work on farms is the same.

Women typically fill the same traditional gendered roles as the previous generation of dairy farm women in Wisconsin. The informants are the childcare providers and housekeepers, which is a gendered role that they have learned from their mothers. Not only do dairy farm wives take care of the family, but they also care for the livestock, assist in finishing field work, and are the primary bookkeepers for the farm. Dairy farm women have also broken traditional gendered roles and have taken on male dominated tasks. Some of the women in the study do the veterinary work, breed cows, are nutritionists, or are the main
managers of the farm. If that was not enough, women are also more likely to have a job off the farm as well.

The respondents realize their lives are hectic, but they would not have it any other way. The benefits of being a dairy farm wife outweigh the costs of being a farmer. The women overwhelmingly agreed that they would rather work the long hours for less money in order to raise their children and work with their families on the farm. The dairy farm women perceived that other people have stereotypes about their roles. Yet, these stereotypes and misconceptions can be dispelled over time as women become more vocal about the reality of their jobs.

Finally, the women in this study believe that society and the agriculture community have become more accommodating of their roles on Wisconsin farms. The majority of the women do not feel that they are treated any different than men in leadership organizations or when working with agribusinesses. The roles of women in Wisconsin’s dairy industry have not changed, but society has changed. Society has become more accepting of women who crossed gendered barriers, including dairy farm wives.

The results will be explained by using social exchange theory (Thibault & Kelley, 1952), symbolic interaction theory (Mead, 1934), and muted group theory (Ardener, 1975; Kramarae, 1981). First, I will describe the roles and responsibilities that dairy farm wives have on Wisconsin farms. Secondly, I will discuss why women hold these roles and how they have learned these roles through gendered socialization. Thirdly, I will examine the meaning of identity, how it is communicated, and what identities dairy farm women ascribe to. Lastly,
I will examine the acceptance of females in the agriculture industry. This portion of the study will discuss if there is more or less gender tolerance in the agriculture community. More specifically, the discussion will focus on the communication with agribusinesses and leadership organizations.

### Roles and Responsibility

What types of roles, responsibilities, and work do Wisconsin dairy farm women complete on dairy operations? The dairy farm women in this study were responsible for milking cows, caring for the calves, carrying out fieldwork, finishing the bookkeeping, and for overseeing the child rearing. Education, experience, farm size, and preference all play an aspect in what type of work dairy farm wives do. Dairy farm wives in this study are in a unique position because their family life and work are often interrelated, unlike most occupations in a post-industrial society.

The first sub theme under the roles and responsibilities theme is the care of the animals on the farm. The income on a dairy farm is derived mainly from the production of milk. On many mid-sized farms, both the husband and wife perform this task together. There was a noticeable difference between the mid-sized and large-sized farms with the frequency of women milking cows.

In this sample, more women on mid-sized farms milk cows on a daily basis compared to the participants on large-sized farms. Women said that they completed the milking with their husbands rather than hiring full-time employees. Four of the seven (4 of 7) dairy farm women in the mid-sized cohort milked cows on a daily basis. Of the three women who do not milk cows, one was unable to
milk because of back surgery and the other two women have four or more children. One of the women with four children said that she would return to milking cows when all of the children begin school and the other woman preferred not to milk cows.

Mid-sized farms in this study, in spite of everything, rely heavily on the labor of their families. None of the mid-sized farms in this sample currently have any full-time employees. Women in this group are more likely to have jobs that require more physical labor including milking cows and caring for calves. These women are also in charge of the bookwork, but the paperwork is not on the same scale as those on larger farms.

Two of the seven (2 of 7) wives in the large-sized cohort milk the cows on a regular basis. Of the two wives that milked cows on a regular basis, one said she only milks the hospital group of cows and the other women milks cows on a daily basis without a milking parlor. Women in the large-sized group were less likely to milk cows on a daily basis because the farm typically hired employees to milk the cows. The large-sized farm owners in this sample have on average 4.6 full-time employees. The majority of the women indicated that they hired employees to milk cows and that they filled in when there is a change in employees or when an employee failed to show up for work.

The large-sized cohort farms in this study have full-time employees to finish various jobs on the farm. They also rely heavily on the work of family members, but family members are more likely to fill managerial roles. Vogt, Jackson-Smith, Ostrom, & Lezberg’s (2001) study found that even though the
work that wives completed on farms was different because of the size of the farm
the number of hours the women put in was the same. The mid-sized and large-
sized cohort wives were equally as vital to their farming operations.

The interesting aspect to this rationale has been that four of the seven (4 of
7) women in the large-sized cohort said they assisted their milking employees by
setting up the milking parlor before the morning shift of employees arrive. Many
of the women said they get the parlor ready for milking, bring in the first group of
cows, and assist in managing the employees. Therefore, women on farms with
more than one hundred cows are less likely to milk cows on a daily basis than
women on mid-sized farms because the milking is completed by hired employees.
By taking away the task of milking cows, women in the large-sized cohort have
more time for management activities, such as bookkeeping or paperwork.
Creating more free time also allows the women to participate in off-farm
employment where women are able to earn desirable benefits such as health and
dental insurance. Some of the women in both cohorts stated they worked off the
farm in order to receive health insurance benefits.

The position of calf caretaker has not changed much over the years. Ten
of the fourteen women (10 of 14) interviewed were responsible for taking care of
the calves. The same situation played out in the caring of calves, as with, milking
cows. Six of the seven (6 of 7) mid-sized cohort farm wives cared for calves
routinely, whereas four of the seven (4 of 7) large-sized cohort farm wives cared
for calves routinely. This again was attributed to the additional hired labor.
Women in the large-sized sample again said that they had employees to complete this task.

Traditionally, women have cared for the calves on the farm because it was a task that they learned as children and was passed on from their mothers. Caring for the calves is a female gendered role on the farm because it is similar to raising children and is a job associated with being a nurturer. One respondent said that she learned how to feed calves from her mother and when she moved on the family farm, she inherited the responsibility of caring for the calves. The same respondent said she is teaching her children how to care for the calves and it has become a part of the children’s responsibilities on the farm. One of the jobs that many of the women in the large-sized cohort retained when their farms grew larger was the task of caring for the calves.

Past research discovered that women were more likely to do work with livestock, rather than fieldwork, which supports this study’s findings (Vogt et al., 2001). Advancements in technology have led to specialization in the field of agriculture. Custom harvesting, planting, and tilling operations have developed across the country. Custom operators have allowed farmers to save money and time on depreciation and maintenance of equipment. Additionally, dairy farmers have saved money because they no longer have to buy the expensive equipment they only use once a year. Since custom operators are finishing more fieldwork for dairy farmers, this explains why fewer women are needed to do field work. Seven of the fourteen (7 of 14) wives stated that they did field work on Wisconsin farms. Out of the seven who do not do any field work, two of the wives said they
hired custom operators, two of the wives said that other employees did the work and the last three did not feel comfortable driving tractors. As technology has made tractors easier and safer to drive, the female labor has simultaneously been replaced by hired labor or custom operators.

The literature review emphasized the increased participation of women as the primary bookkeeper on farms then previous generations of dairy farm women. Vogt et al. (2001) stated that, “This is a task that women on dairy farms have become increasingly responsible for in Wisconsin over the past 30 years. As a result, women tend to be especially in tune with the financial situation of individual dairy farms” (p. 8). In this study, eleven of the fourteen (11 of 14) dairy farm wives stated that they were responsible for the bookkeeping on their farms. Vogt et al.’s (2001) research also found that 83% of the women do the bookkeeping and 91% do the bookwork at least part time. The ethnography by Lueders Bolwerk (1999) concurred with this sentiment by stating, “Most farm women interviewed in the study conducted the bookwork.” The role of bookkeeper has now become a regular part of the household routine.

Why are women doing more of the bookkeeping? One explanation proposed by Lueders Bolwerk (1999) was that over the generations, women have been encouraged by their families to attend universities or academic institutions of high learning. These increased opportunities for additional education have given women more expertise than their counterparts when it comes to communication skills, working with computers, and working with off-farm businesses. This coincides with the fact that eleven of the fourteen (11 of 14)
dairy farm women in this study have at least two years of education past high school. Of those who do have the extended educational experiences, nine of the fourteen (9 of 14) women are responsible for the bookkeeping. From the demographic information provided has formulated one hypothesis for their increased involvement in bookkeeping.

Many women also said they complete the bookwork because they have more patience for it and are better at it than their husbands. Another reason why women often do the bookkeeping more than men is because they are able to multi-task when completing the bookwork. Dairy wives can do bookwork while watching the children or completing other household jobs. This suggests that bookkeeping has become an extension of the household chores.

A majority of the women in this study said they believe they are more involved in the dairy business than previous generations of farm women. Eight of the thirteen (8 of 13) dairy farm wives felt that they had a more hands on role in the daily operation of the farm, than that of their mothers. The participants stated that many of their mothers were employed off of the farm and did not participate as much with the daily farm duties. Other women said their mothers or mother-in-laws had multiple children to do the farm work for them. Study participants believed they are more influential in daily farm decisions or are more hands-on by doing more physical labor.

Respondents believe they have more decision making authority on their farms. One way women have been able to be more influential in the decision making process is because they have gained more access to financial information
by compiling the bookkeeping. Seven of the thirteen (7 of 13) women in this study believed that they had a more active role in the decision making process, then their mothers or their mother-in-laws did. Many women said they felt that they had more financial control over their lives than their mothers did decades ago. Some of the wives raised on farms observed the frustration their mothers felt when their fathers spent money without their mothers’ consultation or input. By being more influential in the daily farm decisions and by having more access to financial information, this may account for why the wives feel more accepted in the industry. This may be how dairy farm women have gained more equality and have become more accepted in the industry.

Many tasks on Wisconsin dairy farms are still predominantly divided by gender. Gender is a symbolic creation primarily learned through the process of communication with others whose meaning grows out of a society’s norms, values, and beliefs (Wood, 1994). Gender is acquired through interaction within a social world, is learned, and is neither innate nor necessarily stable (Wood, 1994). Finally, Howard and Hollander (2000) believe that the term “gender role” refers to, “the characteristics and behaviors believed to be appropriate for men or for women” (p 15).

The gendered role that women in the study most connected with was the position of mother. All of the women (14 of 14) said that they were primarily responsible for raising the children. The majority of the women said that one of the benefits of being an independent business owner was that they could stay home and raise their children. Furthermore, eleven of fourteen (11 of 14) women
expressed the benefits of raising children on the farm. The women said they could spend more time with their children than other people who have a “nine to five” job. The women felt that they were able to both work on the farm and be home with their children at the same time. The respondents explained that the couple could have their children with them in the barn or with them in the cab of the tractor. The dairy farm couples did not have to pay for childcare and did not want other people raising their children. This is one of the reasons many people choose to farm and they cannot imagine raising their children any other way.

Gender socialization can account for one of the reasons that dairy farm women in Wisconsin continue to highly associate with the gendered role of nurturer. Satow (2001) stated, “Gender socialization is the process by which different behaviors and attitudes are encouraged or discouraged in men and women” (p. 1). Children, as they are growing up, learn their gender by observing and imitating their parents, neighbors, teachers or other role models (Howard & Hollander, 2000). Men and women learn their personalities, traits, values, and behaviors through socialization. These lessons also may account for career choices, as well as, decisions about the division of labor in their families (Howard & Hollander, 2000).

If gender is taught through socialization, then the dairy farm women in this study learned their gendered roles and identities during childhood from interaction with others. In this study, twelve of the thirteen (12 of 13) women said their roles as mother and schedule keeper is similar to the role that their mothers had. Therefore, the gendered role of mother was learned from their own
mothers. One participant stated, “She held it all together. I think it’s similar in that sense that mom, that nurturing, that making sure everything was working.”

Dairy farm wives learned their roles from their dairy farm mothers. Lueders Bolwerk (1999) agrees with this perspective and said that, “Daughters are socialized to perform traditional work that previous generations of farm mothers and grandmothers have conducted, while sons follow the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers in the fields and in the barns” (p. 159). This would explain why the women who grew up on dairy farms in Wisconsin identify with the role of mother and farmer.

Yet, three of the women in this study did not grow up on a farm and clearly identified with the same roles. The role of mother is universal in American society and non-farm women learn many of the same traits. One way that non-farm women that married into the dairy business may have learned many of their gendered roles on dairy farms was from their husbands or from their in-laws. The husbands of the three new dairy farm women grew up on Wisconsin dairy farms. These men would have learned not only their gendered roles, but would have observed the societal norms and behaviors of a dairy farm wife while growing up. When the new farm wives communicated and interacted with their husbands, the new wives would have taken on the societal norms concerning gendered roles on Wisconsin farms.

Another gendered role characteristic of dairy farm women was the ascribed position of housekeeper. Ten of the fourteen (10 of 14) participants stated they were responsible for completing household chores. Historically, the
tasks associated with work in the home are undervalued because they are unpaid positions, and are invisible to other members of society (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Vogt et al.’s (2001) research confirmed this gender role in their study. They stated:

The women spend an average of about 30 hours on household work every week, usually more for women with young children and less for women who do not have children at home. Husbands tend to be much less involved in household work than the women and focus on either farm work or off-farm work instead. Half of the husbands spend an hour or less on household tasks every week. Women often depend on their children, especially those who are older and still living at home, to help with household work.

The women in this study may hold the gendered roles of mother and housekeeper, but this is not atypical in most United States households in the United States. In 1995, American women spent 17.5 hours a week on housework, whereas, men reported that they only completed a total of 10 hours of housework per week (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000). If the rest of American society still have these gendered roles in non-farm households, then it is not surprising that this would also be the case for dairy farm women.

Not only do wives on modern dairy farms raise the children, do housework, and finish work on the farm, but many also have off-farm employment. The need for additional income for farm families has grown steadily and women have been the principal provider of this income. In the mid-
sized cohort of this study, four of the seven (4 of 7) women and two of the seven (2 of 7) husbands contribute additional income to the family. Five of the seven (5 of 7) dairy farm wives and two of the seven (2 of 7) husbands in the large-sized group contribute additional income to the family. Therefore, more women than men in the study are currently creating additional income for the family that is not tied to the profit from milk production. Grondine (2006) agreed by saying, “39% of women presently work off of the farm, compared to 32% of men” (p. 1). Many of the women in the study said that their mothers often worked off the farm to contribute to the family income as well.

The distinction between these two groups may appear vast, yet many of the gendered experiences the women have are the same. The core values and traditions of Wisconsin farm families seem virtually identical. As technology, economics, and society continue to ebb and flow, the values and identities of farm women have remained the same.

**Identity**

Identity refers to the more public image of self (Howard & Hollander, 2000). The conception of self is derived through our imagination of how we appear to others, our imagination of how others judge us, and our feelings of ourselves (Howard & Hollander, 2000). The largest portion of a person’s identity is comprised of gender since it is assigned at birth. The moment a baby is born it is immediately associated with a gendered group. Parents dress boys in blue and girls in pink as symbol of their membership in a gendered group. From that point
on, children learn their gender through socialization (Howard & Hollander, 2000). As children grow up they are socialized through communication with others.

Others assign gender at birth, yet a person does not have a sense of self at birth (Mead, 1934; Wood, 1994). Identity is developed over time through communication with others, such as their parents and other family members. Mead (1934) pointed out that humans are different from other animals because they have the ability to reflect on ourselves. Humans can stand outside of themselves in order to describe, perceive, and judge our own actions (Mead, 1934). Our sense of identity begins outside our selves and is then internalized, infusing the values, norms, and beliefs of a larger society (Wood, 1994). Mead (1934) in fact, stated that we can “experience self only after experiencing others” (p. 150). Since gender is one of the most basic and important categories that humans ascribe to, it is a major focus of others’ perceptions and communication (Wood, 1994). Dairy farm women develop their identities through communication with their families, friends, neighbors, and others in the community. This learning process carried out by communication is called socialization.

Who are dairy farm women? The dairy farm wives in this study would answer that they are a mother, farmer, and wife. The identity that all of participants associated with and discussed the most was the role of mother. Even more importantly, the gendered role of mother is the dairy farm woman’s link to other non-farm women. Communicating with other people in the community, be it men or women, is one way that humans express their identities.
The second identity women in the study associated with is the occupation of a farmer. The dairy farm women verbally connected their identity with their occupation. Twelve of the fourteen (12 of 14) informants replied that they enjoyed being a farmer. Women expressed pride for their jobs and many could not imagine doing anything else. The respondent, Tina, expressed her identity most eloquently, when she answered, “I always say I’m a dairy farmer and I am proud that is what I do.”

The women in the study talked about whom they were, what they liked, and their interactions with others. In essence, respondents described their identities. The respondents then proceeded to distinguish the attributes associated with being a dairy farmer, both positive and negative. Eleven of the fourteen (11 of 14) women felt they enjoyed working with animals, working with their husbands, and raising their children on the farm. Nine of fourteen (9 of 14) dairy farm wives loved working independently and having the freedom to set their own hours as small business owners. The female respondents also described negative aspects associated with the occupation of dairy farming, including long hours and unstable income. Eleven of fourteen (11 of 14) women felt that they disliked the long hours associated with being a dairy farmer. In addition, five of the fourteen (5 of 14) dairy farm wives were frustrated by the lack of money and the uncontrollable nature of their business.

Social exchange theory proposed by, Thibault and Kelley (1959) surmised that humans strive to maximize rewards and minimize punishments. Social exchange theory uses cognition as its model of interaction (Howard & Hollander,
Before making a decision, humans weigh the costs and benefits of the outcome of a course of action. People do not always know the actual outcome of their action, but make their decisions based on the perception of the outcome of their actions (Howard & Hollander, 2000). The dairy farm women in this study weighed the costs and benefits when deciding to become a farm wife. The majority of the women in this study believe that the benefits, working independently, working with their families, and working with the animals clearly outweighed the costs, including long hours and unstable pay. In the eyes of the participants, it is better to be a farmer than to not be one.

Identity is concurrently constructed through a person’s imagination of how they appear to others (Wood, 1994). Cooley (1927) developed the concept of the looking glass self. This concept suggests that humans see themselves as we imagine others see us. One way that dairy farm women perceived that they appeared to other non-farm women was that they were hard workers. Ten of the fourteen (10 of 14) respondents said that non-farm women were impressed by the amount of hard work a dairy farm wife was responsible for completing. The majority of the participants said other women were surprised to find out how much work farm wives did. Many non-farm women said they could not imagine having to work so hard and having to take care of the family at the same time. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2002) study agreed when 31% of non-rural Americans in their study perceived rural Americans as hard workers. Therefore, dairy farm women identify themselves, in part, as a group of people who work harder than others, since others perceive that they are hard workers. The wives
are proud that they are hard workers and instill this characteristic in their children through socialization.

Identity is also formed in a human’s reality through a person’s perception of the judgment of others (Wood, 1994). Cooley (1927) similarly proposes that we imagine how others judge us and we then develop a feeling about that judgment. Half of the women in the study, seven of the fourteen (7 of 14) women believed that both men and women outside of the agriculture industry are misinformed about their roles as dairy farm wives. Dairy farm women believe that stereotypes and misconceptions exist about their roles on farms. The stereotype, “just a farm wife” was found in this study, referred to in the media, and was found in other studies. This misconception about the occupation of a dairy farm wife infers that women do not actively participate in the business end of farming, or that a woman’s only role is to work in the house taking care of the children.

Where does this stereotype stem from? Stereotypes about work began to shape the attitudes of Americans in the twentieth century and the doctrine of separate spheres was born (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). The doctrine of separate spheres held that a women’s proper place was in the home and a man’s natural sphere was at his job in the world of commerce and not at home (Davidoff & Hall, 1987; Skolnick, 1991; Reskin & Padavic, 1994). The major consequence, according to the doctrine of separate spheres, was that male work gained approval by society and women’s work became invisible because it was completed in the
Soczka 109

home (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Stereotypes are learned through socialization and socialization is accomplished through communication.

As a result, dairy farm women's was undervalued because it was completed at home, it did not result in direct wages, and was unseen by society. This hidden occupation has developed into the stereotype that dairy farm women do not do anything on farms, but raise the children and work in the house. Six of the fourteen (6 of 14) respondents were given the impression from other men that dairy farm women did not know anything about farming. Vogt et al.'s (2001) participants expressed the same problem:

The issue that stood out as the most problematic for many dairy farm women was that people do not necessarily recognize the work that women do on farms. Nearly every woman in the interviews shared an anecdote of a time in which a salesperson, parts dealer, implement dealer, veterinarian, church person, or others were not aware of or did not acknowledge their involvement on the farm (p. 17).

A majority of the women in this study agreed with this sentiment by saying that men acted as though dairy farm wives did not know or do anything on the farm.

Since many farm women are still able to stay home with their children, their work remains hidden. If women stay home to work and raise their children, then they will also have less contact with other non-farm men and women. Less communication with others leaves other non-farm people to imagine their roles and create untrue beliefs about their occupations. Many study participants commented that they should get out more. The participants believed that they did
not have much communication with other people in the community. The lack of communication with non-farm Wisconsinites has allowed this misconception to persist. This is a misconception because dairy farm women in this study say they milk cows, drive tractors, feed calves, manage employees, and complete bookwork. Farm women do have gendered roles, but unlike many other women, they cross gender boundaries frequently.

Muted group theory discusses another reason that dairy farm wives are stereotyped. According to muted group theory, women express their identities through a male-dominated system of language, making it harder for women to be articulate. Women have a harder time communicating their feelings, thoughts, and expressions using words formulated primarily by males. The inarticulate woman has developed because the language used is derived from their male counterpart’s perceptions of reality, not their own (Kramarae, 1981). As the years pass, the dominant group may develop a system of communication that supports this worldview, subjecting others to experiences that the language does not reflect, in effect muting the minority group’s worldview (Kramarae, 1981). If dairy farm wives were not able to express their true feelings or communicate their real identities to others in society, then misconceptions could have developed regarding their work on the farm. Dairy farm wives need to be willing to speak and others need to be willing to listen.

As more and more farm women entered the workforce in the past few decades, perhaps farm women have had more interaction with other non-farm members of society. By increasing communication with non-farmers, then an
increased awareness of the reality of dairy farming can assist in disassembling the
dairy farm wife myth. This increased communication may result in a greater
appreciation of the roles and responsibilities that farm women hold in the dairy
industry.

**Gender Acceptance**

Gender expectations can change over time in a given society (Wood, 1994). Have gender expectations changed in the agriculture community? Do women encounter any gendered intolerance? One avenue that women are utilizing to express their identities is by being active members in leadership organizations, talking with other non-farm community members, and by their increased communication with agribusinesses. The following gender acceptance section will work to answer the above stated questions. The theme will use muted group theory to guide the discussion about gender acceptance, gendered communication, and gender structures.

First, Shirley and Edwin Ardener contend that there are two forms of mutedness. When Edwin Ardener (1975) observed that his fellow colleagues only focused their attention on talking with the males in a group, he realized the opposite sex was being unintentionally silenced. Traditionally, the males in a group were the translators, speakers, or interpreters in studies (Ardener, 1975). It was easier for the male researcher to communicate with a male respondent due to things they had in common, mainly their gendered experiences. The situation described was one of a like-minded individual talking to another like-minded
individual. The like-minded individuals had an easier time relating to each other because they had gendered experiences in common.

This concept was observed in this study on dairy farm women. This situation occurred when salesmen asked to speak to the male farmer of the partnership versus talking directly to the female in the partnership. The salesman may not be intentionally excluding the female dairy farmer, but may feel more comfortable speaking with a like-minded person. Therefore, salesmen may intentionally or unintentionally seek out the male farmer in the operation because they have the same gendered experiences in common. A salesman may also ask for the male of the partnership because women have traditionally appeared inarticulate due to the fact that women have not shared equally in the formation of language.

Wisconsin dairy farm women, overall, did not perceive any gender discrimination from agribusinesses or leadership organizations. Twelve of fourteen (12 of 14) dairy farm wives did not feel they were treated any differently when purchasing farm supplies from a salesman. Similarly, all of the dairy farm wives (14 of 14) did not feel that they were treated any differently when purchasing farms supplies from a saleswoman. The wives said they were able to strike up a conversation with a sales woman more often then with a man. Perhaps, the women did not perceive any gender inequity from salesmen because they are of the same gender and have gendered experiences in common. In fact, some of the women said saleswomen were friendly to them because they had more things in common to talk about. Like-minded people speaking with other like-minded
individuals would explain the reason why women may not perceive any
differential treatment from saleswomen or from women in leadership
organizations.

The respondents did not perceive that they were being treated differently,
although the words of the various salesmen were constructed with the intention of
silencing the dairy farm wife’s opinion. Shirley Ardener (1975) proposed that the
second form of mutedness was that women’s mutedness is the counterpart to
men’s deafness. She believed that women or any other subordinate group do
speak, but that the dominant group does not listen (Ardener, 1975). Tara
described this scenario with a salesman when she said:

Like if my husband says I have to talk to my wife, I think they, kind of
like, they don’t really say anything, but they kind of give you that look
like, “Don’t you make the decisions?” Kinda of deal. You know, its like,
“I can’t believe you’ve got to talk to her.” Especially, when it comes to
money, I think a lot of the guys, men in the industry, even if they’re
selling equipment or whatever, because we’ve had people, salesmen come
in and I say, “We have no money” and they’ll try to talk to Mike and Mike
is like “Did you not hear her, she says we don’t have the money.”

In this example, the salesman clearly ignored Tara and the salesman proceeded to
try to appeal to the husband. The salesman tried to bypass the women and did not
take her opinion into consideration.

Even though farm women in this study did not perceive any gender
discrimination by salesmen in general, seven of the fourteen (7 of 14) did point
out a difference in service when working with equipment dealers, mechanics, or in machine shops. The respondents did not want to generalize and a majority of the time thought it depended on the behavior of an individual. Women in other studies have agreed with this study’s participants that silencing by salesmen still exists. The Vogt et al.’s (2001) research confirmed:

Some women described how salespeople (including women) insist on talking to their husbands instead of them, even when they are equally or more prepared than their husbands to handle the matter. Many of women added that their husbands back them up when such situations arise. A number of women, particularly the women over 56 years old, remarked the situation has improved for women since they started farming. Also, nearly a third of the women in the interviews feel that this issue is not a problem for them, particularly women 40 or younger (pg. 17).

In Tara’s example her husband also backed up her up by reiterating what Tara said to the salesman. Dairy farm men have realized how knowledgeable and important their wives are to the operation.

After time, the subordinate group tends to stop trying to articulate their thoughts and they may even stop thinking them (Ardener, 1978). Women in this study tried to avoid feeling incompetent in front of the opposite gender. Many women admitted they were not mechanically inclined, but did not want a salesman to perceive that they were not. Six of the fourteen (6 of 14) dairy farm wives had their husbands preorder items from a salesman. This was the participants’ way of avoiding any issues or situations where they maybe perceived
as ignorant. Since the women by ordering agricultural supplies may be crossing into a formerly male dominated task, they altered their behavior to work within the system. Rather than try to articulate their thoughts or ideas with salesman, they avoided the conversation all together. Thus, women have felt less muted because they have stopped trying to break the stigma. There are many male dairy farmers who are not mechanically inclined and have to ask questions when purchasing supplies, how do salespeople treat these men? Yet, when avoid attempting to order parts from a salesman in order to avoiding the feeling of incompetence this only reinforces the stereotype that women are not mechanically inclined. Women may be unintentionally reinforcing the belief by others that they are ignorant about mechanics, since they avoid conversations involving machinery parts.

Another reason women did not believe salesman treated them any differently was that they perceived that the salesman is a friend. Six of the fourteen (6 of 14) dairy farm wives commented that the salesman they worked with knew who they were. The female client and her husband have built a personal, trustful relationship with the salesman. Therefore, even if these women were experiencing the effects of muted group theory they would not necessarily recognize any male dominated behavior. Humans perceive that friends do not treat their friends unequally. This may also be the reason that women do not see the substructure of muted group theory in their own relationships with their husbands, friends, or family.
How are women treated in leadership organizations? Women again said that overall they did not feel as though they were treated any differently in a leadership organization when working with men and women. Eight of fourteen (8 of 14) dairy farm wives did not observe any difference in their treatment in leadership organizations by men. Thirteen out of fourteen (13 of 14) informants stated that other women in organizations did not treat them any differently. Once again, the wives felt that women were more respectful and that there was a fairer division of responsibilities when working with women. The wives are speaking and interacting with other like-minded individuals with whom they share similar gendered experiences. Lastly, the informants said that other women were more open to discussing and trying new ideas, then men.

Although the majority of the dairy farm women in this study feel that they were treated equally in leadership organizations, some participants did not think they were treated equally. Six of the fourteen (6 of 14) women did not feel that they were treated equally in leadership organizations. The women expressed dissatisfaction because men were not open to listening to their new ideas. Men in organizations did not value their input and roadblocks were set up to discourage their participation in organizations. Men assume that women wanted to take on the stereotypical secretarial roles and that is why they are there. As before, many women did not blame the organization as a whole, but often pointed to individual behaviors of certain men.

What can women do to curtail their unequal treatment? Feminists and other theorists have been interested in the possibilities for change in society
As stated before, the concept of gender is neither static nor constantly changing. The relationship between the dominant group and the subordinate group is in a continual state of flux. Kramarae’s (1981) third belief is that, “In order to participate in society women must transform their own models in terms of the received male system of expression” (p. 3). Since the male dominated language structure has been in place for centuries then the female subordinate group will have to work within the system to make effective changes.

Dairy farm women in Wisconsin will still struggle with finding their voice and communicating their concerns, but they are slowly making progress. Ten of the fourteen (10 of 14) dairy farm women said that they feel more accepted in the industry. The other four of the fourteen participants (4 of 14) stated that they felt indifferent about the question. These four women said they did not feel more or less accepted in the dairy industry than anyone else. The women in this study felt that they have more freedom, are more respected, and have more input in the decision making process than previous generations of farm wives. Carol explained it the best when she said:

Well, I would say things have changed in the 20 years that we’ve farmed together. My sister, Bethany, and I always joke that, in the early years, there was a couple of salesmen, one in particular, who couldn’t just get it through his head, and would come up, and he did it to both of us, and he would say, “Is the boss around?” and we would both kind of, we kind of joked because we’d say, “Yeah, you’re looking at one of them.” and he wouldn’t talk to us, and he would say, “Well, I’ll come back when Jack’s
available or Robert's available.” It kind of miffed you, you know, but it kind of got to be a joke, too, because then we realized it was his stupidity, rather than our inability. Anyway, I think I have seen a really big change in that, especially this last 10 years, I will have feed salesmen just walk in and start conversing with me on what we we’d like or what they think we’d like. As the respondents in this study demonstrated in many of their answers that they have felt more accepted in the industry and that things have improved for women.

Carol observed changes in the sales people and was encouraged by the changes that have taken place in the industry. Women in this pilot study repeatedly insisted that things have improved in the agriculture community and that there is more equality.

American society in general has become more accepting of women and their ability to push past gendered boundaries to take on traditionally male dominated tasks. If the gendered roles on farms have not drastically changed, then American society has changed. As women work within the male dominated system and have become more vocal, then society in the United States has become more gender neutral. Society has become more accommodating of the increased participation of women in agriculture even though many of their roles have not changed much over time. Farm women were more silent when gendered roles on farms were more rigid. As barriers have become more lax, more women have become increasingly vocal. The women in this study feel that they are less inarticulate and are less muted. Muted group theory is still valid because it does
appear in many situations. Yet, the occurrence or rate at which the inarticulate women surfaces is becoming less frequent. In the broad sense, women have made advancements in negotiating their ability to express their opinions.

The roles and responsibilities on Wisconsin farmers have largely remained unchanged. The change, which dairy farm women of the current generation recognize, is that they have more influence in the decision making process on their farms. The women believe that they have more management responsibility and are more hands on in the operation. Dairy farm women on farms with 100 to 500 cows have taken on more of a managerial role on farms and are less likely to milk cows, care for calves, or do fieldwork, than those in the mid-sized cohort. Full-time employees are now filling these roles for women on dairy farms. Many women still complete these functions in the large-sized cohort, but not as frequently as those in the mid-sized cohort. The work that wives do on farms may vary depending on the size of the farm, but the number of hours women work is the same. Both groups work a substantial amount of hours and are equally as important on their farms.

As the size of the farm grows, so does the amount of paperwork. According to the literature review, more women on Wisconsin farms have taken on the responsibility of principal bookkeeper. This may coincide with the fact that many of the women in the study had at least two years of education past high school. If dairy farm wives have more experience with computers, have better writing skills, and have developed better organizational skills because of their education, then they are more likely to fill the position of bookkeeper.
Participants also felt that they had more time and more patience than their husbands to complete this task.

Work on Wisconsin dairy farms has remained predominately divided by gender with women fulfilling the more nurturing jobs on dairy farm, including raising children and animals. Men are filling the more masculine roles of raising crops, driving tractors, and fixing machinery. Wives in both the mid-sized and large-sized groups are still in charge of taking care of the children and running the household, just as their mothers did on Wisconsin farms. Dairy farm wives learned their gendered roles through the process of socialization that was communicated to them by their mothers, mother-in-laws, families, and husbands.

Dairy farm wives are both farmers and mothers. Humans develop their identities by communicating and interacting with others. The most prominent gendered role that dairy farm wives identified with was the position of mother. The gendered role of mother was an identity that allowed farm women to connect with and communicate other non-farm women. The dairy farm wives perceived that non-farm women understood the amount of work they completed on farms and better understood their roles, than men. The care of children was a gendered experience that they shared.

Secondly, social exchange theory accounted for why these women are dairy farm wives. The benefits of being a farm wife for these participants clearly outweighed the costs of being a farmer. The dairy farm wives are willing to work long hours for a fluctuating income because the benefits of being home and
working with their families is more advantageous. The dairy farm women valued the time they spent with their family more than the valued leisure time or money.

The respondents were aware that stereotypes or misconceptions exist about their positions on dairy farms. The wives perceived that other people assumed that did not do work on farms or that their work was of little value. The doctrine of separate spheres explains that the work wives on Wisconsin farms do is underappreciated and misunderstood because it is unseen by society, does not result in direct wages, and is done at home (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Since farm women’s work is unseen, other people in society develop misconceptions about what it is that they do on dairy farms.

Another reason a stereotype may exists is because women appear more inarticulate than men in society. Muted group theory proposes that women have to express their identities through a male dominated system of language, making it harder to express their true gendered experiences (Karamarae, 1981). Dairy farm wives have appeared inarticulate in the past because men are the main formulators of language. If dairy farm wives did not communicate their identities frequently with community members, then a stereotype could have emerged. Yet, since gender expectations can change over time, these stereotypes can be dispelled.

Next, agribusinesses and leadership organizations have become more accepting of female patrons over time. The dairy farm wives in this study feel that women have gained more respect in the industry and society in the past few decades. Although the wives did feel that there was more acceptance of their
roles on dairy farms many still relayed experiences where their gender was an issue. This occurred for dairy farm wives when salesmen ignored them and insisted on speaking with the male of the household. The women said they only felt a difference in service from male equipment dealers or from machine shop employees. Tasks involving mechanical equipment have long been considered a male gendered role on farms, thus many salesmen were seeking out the male of the household because of this learned stereotype. The men assumed that because of their gender, they did not know anything about mechanics or equipment. Some of the women in the study admitted they were not mechanically inclined, but that they needed the information that salesman was offering in order to be an active participant in the decision making process. The women needed to talk to the salesman, had questions for the salesman, and were involved with the decision to purchase equipment or not.

A majority of the women did not feel any discrimination in leadership organizations, but did feel that men were not as open to considering new ideas that they proposed. If men begin to listen and utilize the new ideas that women presented, then they may lose their male dominant position in organizations. Muted group theory states that a women's mutedness is the counterpart to men's deafness. Men refuse to take into account the ideas of women to avoid losing their status in the organization.

This study expected to find that women's roles on farms had vastly changed, but instead found that it is society that has changed. Society has become more accepting of dairy farm wives' roles and the roles of women in many
occupations. Society has become more tolerant of women and men fulfilling roles that cross gender boundaries. In conclusion, dairy farm women are taking a more active role in the operation of their dairy farms, communicating their identities, and have gained more recognition in society.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

This chapter contains a summary of the phenomenological study of the gendered experiences of dairy farm women in Wisconsin. In depth qualitative data was acquired by interviewing fourteen dairy farm women who are in partnership with their husbands and who live scattered throughout Wisconsin. Seven women from dairy farms of 100 or less cows were interviewed and seven women from dairy farms with 100 to 500 cows were interviewed in order to examine any variations in their experiences. The last chapter of this thesis contains the implications, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this research endeavor was to describe the lived gendered experiences of dairy farm women in Wisconsin. The scholar attempted to capture the essence of what it is to be a Wisconsin dairy farm woman. The researcher wrote her experience with the phenomena and bracketed out her bias. Next the researcher extracted out the significant statements using horizontalization and assigned them equal value. Then the analyst clustered the themes in an attempt to capture the essence of the gendered experiences of dairy farm women. The researcher found through three major themes, which included roles and responsibilities, identity, and gender acceptance. A plethora of sub themes were found in the three major themes. Last of all, the researcher analyzed the information provided to explain the gendered experiences of dairy farm wives in Wisconsin.
This study expected to find that women’s roles have changed over time, when in fact, it is society that has changed over time. Gendered roles and responsibilities in Wisconsin farm families have not been drastically altered. Technology and economic situations may change very rapidly, whereas, societal expectations change at a much slower pace. Society has begun to recognize the importance of the work women do on Wisconsin farms, their active role in decision making, and are incorporating the image of a woman with that of a farmer. If muted group theory is correct and gender expectations in a society can change over time, then women can become more articulate, men can become active listeners, and society can become more accepting.

**Implications**

This information derived from this study may be advantageous to a sizeable amount of people. By studying the communication of dairy farm women, it can provide valuable information for agribusinesses, leadership organizations, and academia. Agribusinesses can learn how to better communicate with their customers, leadership organizations can learn how to better develop female leadership, and universities can learn how to be better recruiters.

If women are more involved in making management decisions, especially financial decisions, on modern dairy farms, then educational institutions need to continue to provide programs which are relevant and beneficial to dairy farm women. By recruiting women into programs, such as UW-Madison’s short course and other agricultural degree programs, then dairy farm wives will develop skills that will enhance their businesses. University extension professionals can
learn how to serve their clients better by reviewing the results of this study. Hopefully, the information gathered through this study will create an awareness of the evident transformation of women in the agriculture sector.

The results of thesis can assist the agriculture industry by creating a better understanding of the meaning of dairy farm women to their agribusinesses. The results can assist agribusinesses in ascertaining the roles women hold on farms and can help them to serve their customers better. Women are an integral part of the dairy industry and are the fastest growing source of new farmers, across all sectors of agriculture. This study can assist salesmen in recognizing the type of communication or the lack of communication, which causes them to loose or keep female customers. The results of this study can help agribusinesses market their products more effectively to their female customers.

One suggestion for leadership organization is to dissolve women’s auxiliary groups. Women only groups were originally designed to enhance the leadership abilities of women and to give women more of an opportunity to be involved in the association, but in a role that held less power. Some leadership organizations need to integrate women into all facets of their associations to ensure their voices are accounted for. Providing an opportunity for segregating female farmers into women’s’ groups only encourages the mutedness of women. Auxiliary groups inadvertently set up a hierarchical order to the organization causing women to be in a subordinate position. By separating the sexes the opposite of the organization’s intention is achieved and the wrong message may be sent to their members. A variety of groups inside and outside of agriculture
have already dissolved their auxiliary groups to stop the loss of potential talent. More associations, groups, and churches need to follow their lead. By reviewing these results leadership organizations can learn how to better serve their members.

Thus, agribusinesses, educational institutions, and leadership organizations will need to tailor their practices to attract women to their programs in order for them to succeed. Wisconsin farm women are and will become a large contingency of the future leaders in the industry, thus these institutions need to recognize and utilize their talents.

Most importantly if women who are currently involved in production agriculture read this thesis, then they will realize that they are not alone in their struggle to vocalize their identities. These women will understand that there are underlying communication barriers which make it harder for them to articulate their wants and desires. By reading this thesis individuals will learn more about the intricate balance between the sexes. The communication in muted group theory still exists, but can be marginalized and less frequent.

Finally, this information is significant to non-farm men and women because it can dispel misconceptions that they have about dairy farm women. Since most Wisconsinites do not live on farms, they do not realize the impact that men and women in dairy industry have in their lives. Agriculture is Wisconsin’s largest industry and employs more people than any other industry in the state. By learning more about the lives of dairy farm women, Wisconsin residents will have a better understanding and appreciation of the business in their own backyard – agriculture.
**Limitations**

With any research endeavor, whether it is qualitative or quantitative, there are limitations to the application of the knowledge acquired from the study. Gaps will always exist in the sample, the results, and the analysis of data. By confronting and considering these limitations, future researchers can conduct additional research to account for these disparities. The limitations of this study may include the following:

1. This study cannot be generalized to other women, to women who are involved in other forms of production agriculture, or women who participate in dairy farming outside of Wisconsin.

2. The potential for researcher bias does exist and the researcher’s inexperience may be a factor. Researcher bias may occur when using purposeful sampling, yet access to those experiencing the phenomena may not have been acquired without it.

3. Participants may not always be truthful and their memories may not be entirely accurate. They may also try to tell the researcher what they think the researcher may want to hear, rather than the actual description of the experience.

4. Not all of the participants may have useful data.

5. Participants use diverse language in dissimilar ways (Berger, 2000). The intended meaning may not be communicated in a way that is understood by the researcher.

6. Qualitative discoveries are restricted to the time frame in which they
are being researched and cannot be generalized to other time periods. The findings of this research may change over time for each participant (Soczka, 1999).

Communication scholars should conduct future research to assist with filling in the gaps of this study. Agriculture is an industry, which needs further exploration in terms of the role communication plays in the lives of the individuals in the industry. The last section of this thesis will provide suggestions for future research in these areas.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Suggestions for future research in the field of agriculture communication include:

1. Research and discover the lived experiences of dairy farm husbands and children.

2. Communication scholars should conduct further research on the gendered socialization of children on Wisconsin dairy farms.

3. Further research should be conducted on the communication or the lack of communication between farmers and rural residents, as the growth of suburbs push into farm country.

4. Further research should include exploring the experiences farm women have at their off-farm jobs. The research should include examining the interpersonal communication they have with the men and women they work with at their off-farm jobs.
5. Further research should be conducted on the communication that dairy farm grandmothers and their granddaughters exchange.

6. An interesting study in this area would be the transfer and communication of cultural American farm values to minority employees.

7. Another study, which would be of value, would be to research turning point theory on Wisconsin farms that make the decision to expand the dairy farm beyond fifty cows.

8. Public relations scholars should continue to examine the growing message that large farms are harmful to the environment and to the tradition of farm families.

There is a need for more qualitative research on American farmers and how communication affects their lives. As the suburbs continue to grow and consumers begin to play a larger role in the products farmers produce, communication will grow in importance for American farmers. Agriculture has a bright future with the introduction of value added products, bio-fuels, and possible production of pharmaceuticals. The success of American farmers will not only depend on the imagination of new products, but their ability to communicate with their consumers. Both male and female farmers will need to communicate their identities and experiences in order for society to understand their occupations.
Appendix A

**Interview Questions**

Time of the interview: ____________
Date: ____________
Interviewee: ____________

1. What is it like to be a woman in farming?

2. When you are talking to a man and he discovers that you are a woman who is farming, what is his reaction?

3. When you are talking to a woman and she discovers that you are a woman who is farming, what is her reaction?

4. What do you tell people when they ask about your occupation as a farmer?

5. How are you treated when you purchase farm supplies, if the person at the counter is a man?

6. How are you treated when you purchase farm supplies, if the person at the counter is a woman?

7. Are you treated any differently in a leadership organization when you are working with a man?

8. Are you treated any differently in a leadership organization when you are working with a woman?

9. How have your experiences in agriculture changed over time?

10. Do you feel more or less accepted in the industry?

11. How do you think your role as a woman in dairy farming is similar to what your mother’s role was?

12. How do you think your role as a woman in dairy farming is different from what your mother’s role was?
Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate in a Human Subject Research

Kelly Soczka, a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, is conducting a research project to study the communication of gendered experiences of dairy farm women in Wisconsin. I would appreciate your participation in this study by agreeing to be interviewed and by touring your dairy facility. This interview should take a maximum of two hours.

This study should pose not medical or social risk to you, other than the inconvenience of the time allotted to participate in the interview. While there may be no immediate benefit to you, it is hoped that priceless information will be obtained to further the knowledge of society regarding gendered communication.

The information recorded from the interviews, the farm tour, and the demographic questionnaire will be recorded anonymously. A pseudonym name will be used in the place of your name in the study. No identifying information will be used. The demographic information will provide the reader with a reference tool with which to better comprehend the role of participant in their families agricultural operation. With your permission, the interviews will be audiotaped. All data will be stored in a locked safe in the researcher’s home. The data obtained from the interviews will be retained for five years and will then be destroyed.

Participants in this study do not have to participate in this study, can refuse to respond to questions, or can withdraw from the study at any time. You may also refuse to have your interviews audiotaped. Withdrawal from the study will not harbor any hurt feelings or have any negative repercussions. Your information at that point will be destroyed. Once the study is completed, I would be glad to give you the results. In the meantime, if you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me at:

Kelly Soczka
Department of Communication
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481 (715) 346-2060

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write:

Dr. Karlene Ferrante, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Academic Affairs Office
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-3712

I have received a comprehensive explanation of the study and I agree to participate.

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Signature of Participant
Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Interviewee: ____________
Date: ________________

1. Number of years farming: ________________

2. Age: __________________________

3. Number of children & their ages: ________________

4. Number of cows: __________________________

5. Number of tillable acres: __________________________

6. List crops raised: __________________________

7. Highest education level completed: __________________________

8. List additional sources of income: __________________________

9. List the typical tasks you complete or are responsible for on the farm:
   __________________________

10. How long have you been responsible for these tasks?
    __________________________

11. Have any of these tasks changed overtime? If so, when & why did your role change?
    __________________________

12. Do you have any other employees on the farm? If so, how many?
    __________________________
References


Grondine, T. (2006, September 4). *Bringing home the bacon: Women’s important*
role in farming. Retrieved on September 6, 2006, from
&file=fo0904.htm


movement: Some implications of the gender dimension. Society &
Natural Resources, 10(3), 251-258.

21st century. (Center for the Study of Rural America). Federal Reserve
Bank of Kansas City. 1-4.

Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Jackson-Smith, D. & Barham, B. (2000, August). The changing face of Wisconsin
dairy farms: A summary of PATS’ research on structural change in the
1990’s. (Program on Agricultural Technology Studies, A unit of the
University of Wisconsin – Madison and University of Wisconsin –

Jackson-Smith, D., Moon, S., Ostrom, M., & Barham, B. (2000). Farming in
Wisconsin at the end of the century: Results of the 1999 Wisconsin farm
poll. Wisconsin Farm Research Summary. (Program on Agricultural
Technology Studies, A unit of the University of Wisconsin – Madison and


United States Department of Agriculture (2005, September 30). *Johanns*
announces $14.6 million for value added producer grants: Projects in 42 states selected, bioenergy, dairy producers get funding. Retrieved on March 7, 2007 from http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB/.cmd/ad/.ar/raisecontent/c/6.2.1UH/.ce/7.2.5JM/.p/5.2.4TQ/.d/1/.th/1.2.9D/_s.7.0_A/7.0_1OB?PC.7.2.5JM_contentid=2005%2F09%2F0411.xml&P.C.7.2.5JM_navtype=RT&PC.7.2.5JM_parentnav=LATEST_RELEASE


